

Personology

From individual to ecosystem

Fifth Edition



C Moore, HG Viljoen, WF Meyer

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PREFACE

Fifth edition

The authors are grateful that the previous editions of this book were so well received that the textbook was prescribed at several South African universities and colleges and that it was considered necessary to produce a fifth edition. Cora Moore and Henning Viljoen were the main authors for the fifth edition, with Teria Shantall, Desmond Painter and Andrea Hurst contributing in their special fields of expertise. Although Werner Meyer was not involved in this edition, he did contribute to the original material and the ‘Meyer, Moore, Viljoen book’ has become such a ‘brand name’ over nearly thirty years, that we kept it as such.

The content

Personology as a field of study forms such an integral part of psychology and is so tightly interwoven with the historical development of psychology as a subject, that nearly every other terrain of psychology is linked with it. It was therefore highly important to produce a book that would cover the broadest possible spectrum of approaches, in order to cater for the needs of a diverse population of readers.

Some of the older approaches had to be included despite their current lack of prominence, because the terminology and ideas associated with these approaches still influence psychological thinking today. In terms of a user analysis, it was decided to omit the theory of James Hillman and to update the historical overview to include 21st century thinking and in particular to update the approaches/perspectives included in the last part of the book, i.e., the ecosystemic approach, the Eastern perspective and the African perspective. The Lacan chapter was completely rewritten.

The presentation

It is our objective in this book, as was the case in the previous editions, to provide clear explanations of personality theories, particularly with undergraduate as well as postgraduate students in South Africa in mind. New literature and insights, as well as references to websites and videos were added to enhance learning. Effective methods of highlighting, colour and text layout were used to add to the quality of the presentation and to enhance the user experience.

This edition is presented in an outcomes-based dialogical style. The expected outcomes are stated at the beginning of each chapter and self-evaluation questions and activities are included in the text to enhance the interaction of the reader with the text. The self-evaluation questions are aimed at testing the knowledge and understanding gained through the interaction with the text. The activities are offered to allow the reader to participate and to make the text personally relevant. The examples and case studies are offered to illustrate the relevance of the theory for everyday life experiences.

The dialogical style is achieved by posing questions and offering the text as explanations to these questions. The text has, in some cases, been simplified and clarified and special care has been taken to ensure gender and cultural equality and to take readers with different sexual orientations into consideration. Enrichment sections are offered as interesting additions to the main text. An evaluation of the theory and a list of suggested readings are provided for each chapter.

The new edition contains new artwork, illustrations and photographs that should be of particular value in making the text ‘come alive’. A date outline is provided at the beginning of the book in order to indicate the position of a particular theorist within the historical timeframe and within a particular approach.

The explanations of key terms are now offered alongside the text. This is done to accommodate the fact that similar concepts/terms are used differently by different theorists and therefore need to be contextualised.

Methodological approach

Besides the conceptual systems as such, we attempt to explain the underlying assumptions and thought patterns of the theorists. We also try to convey accurately the implications and applications of each theory for practical aspects of psychology as well as for everyday living. This should enhance the utility value of the book for all students of Psychology as well as laypeople, as personality theories are a rich source of practical wisdom. The implications for the interpretation and handling of aggression are included in each chapter. This is done, not only because it is a relevant topic for the world we live in, but also to alert students to the fact that different perspectives can contribute to a better understanding of a specific topic or theme.

Attention is given to research, particularly recent, relevant South African research, and emphasis is placed on the historical development of the broad approaches and the way in which the theories within an approach are linked. The introductions to each part of the book provide a contextual framework within which the theories or perspectives can be studied. The author and subject indexes should make it easier for the reader to find specific information.

Teacher and learner support material

The lecturer/tutor and student support material previously accompanied the book in the form of a CD. This material was extended to include more questions and answers and to provide links to relevant websites and videos. The support material can now be accessed on the Pearson e-site and the Learning Management System (LMS) of universities. We trust that this material will be of value to teachers and students.

Revision of the fourth edition: Acknowledgements

The aim of this edition was to update the material and to bring it into line with the requirements of students in the technologically advanced era. This held tremendous challenges for ‘old’ authors and we wish to thank all those who helped us in this process most sincerely – especially our partners and friends who had to not only provide expert help, but also moral support.

We are very grateful to Desmond Painter for updating the African perspectives chapter and also for adding insights into 21st century thinking in Psychology. Thank you Desmond, your excellent contributions definitely add to the value of the book. Thank you too to Andrea Hurst who brought a breath of fresh air to the Lacan chapter. Thanks again to our long-standing co-author Teria Shantall for updating the Frankl chapter. She is internationally renowned in this field and it shows.

Our sincere thanks to the whole team at Pearson for their various contributions. We asked for an elegant look and design and you succeeded magnificently! The permissions process was a nightmare ... How you slogged through it with utter determination was a marvel – thank you. And thank you to Elmarie van der Riet for the meticulous editing.

Thank you to Silvia Raninger who, when we wanted to bail out, kept on believing in the book and said: “We will do it, it will be beautiful and it will sell!” We did it, the book is indeed beautiful and the fact that you are reading this proves that it is selling!

Cora Moore and Henning Viljoen

December 2016

Timeline: A chronological positioning of the theories

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PART 2: Depth psychological approaches

3 Freud (1856–1939)

4 Jung (1875–1961)

5 Adler (1870–1937)

6 Horney (1885–1952)

6 Fromm (1900–1980)

7 Erikson (1902–1994)

8 Lacan (1901–1981)

PART 3: Behavioural and learning theory approaches

9 Skinner (1904–1990)

10 Rotter (1916–2014)

10 Bandura (1925–)

10 Mischel (1930–)

PART 4: Person-oriented approaches

11 Maslow (1908–1970)

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13 Kelly (1905–1967)

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PART 1

Introduction



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Chapter 1

Personology

Werner Meyer and Cora Moore

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1.1 Outcomes

- Understand why personology is an extension of our everyday knowledge of human nature.
- Explain why there are so many personality theories.
- Define key concepts such as ‘person’, ‘personality’, ‘character’, ‘temperament’, ‘self’, ‘personism’, ‘situationalism’ and ‘interactionism’.
- Understand how the content of the book is organised into the different parts and within each chapter.

1.2 Background

Why study personology?

KEY TERM

personology: the branch of psychology that focuses on the study of the individual's characteristics and of differences between people

Personology is a subject that everyone knows something about. Because we all have implicit ideas or theories about how humans function, we may all, in a sense, be called personologists. However, we do not really know enough about this fascinating subject because we all make mistakes in the predictions of our own behaviour and that of others, and in the way we approach our fellow human beings. Our acquaintances often surprise us and make us realise that our theories about people and their functioning are not always correct. This is clearly illustrated when people discuss a person whom they all know well and find, to their amazement, that they all have different ideas about the person. For that matter, our own behaviour often makes us realise how little we know about ourselves!

The incompleteness of our knowledge about the forces that control behaviour results in different opinions about the nature of human behaviour and what motivates it. This diversity is apparent, for example, among a group of mothers discussing child-rearing practices, or farmers talking about how to treat their farm labourers, or a group of teachers debating the appointment of new school prefects.

If the average person has so many different ideas and opinions about *human functioning*, then it can be expected that psychologists, whose task it is to find explanations for human functioning through detailed research, will also hold widely divergent views.

The aim of this book is to provide a systematic overview of the most important psychological theories about human functioning. This field of study, which is known as *personality psychology* or *personology*, can be of great benefit since it allows us to re-examine our thinking about human functioning, and could very well leave us with a better understanding of our own and others' functioning.

1.3 Personology and everyday knowledge of human nature

Since personology can be regarded as a kind of extension of our everyday knowledge about human nature, what exactly is the difference between everyday knowledge of human nature and personology?

Although everyone has this kind of knowledge, not everyone develops it to the same degree. Some people are notorious for their poor understanding of other people because they invariably say and do the wrong things at the wrong time, while others understand people so well that they sometimes seem to be able to read their minds. However, closer investigation usually reveals that even those who are considered good judges of people have only limited abilities. They understand certain people – usually those who are similar to themselves – better than others, or their knowledge is limited to specific types of situations.

Regardless of our level of understanding, our ability to judge people depends mainly on four sources of information, namely *cultural tradition*, *direct communications from others*, *observation of others' behaviour* and *self-observation*.

Cultural tradition is an especially rich source of information. Novels, dramas, songs, expressions and idioms contain much information and wisdom about the nature of people. The expression 'The devil finds work for idle hands' is just one example. (This expression maintains that boredom leads people into mischief.) Furthermore, in each social group there are opinions and stereotypes about people in general, and ideas about the characteristics of certain types of people. There is, for example, the stereotype that all redheads are quick-tempered. Astrology, which is most often disseminated to the public in articles entitled *The stars and you*, is to a large extent an assembly of cultural stereotypes about people. This type of knowledge, however, is not always reliable, as it is unsystematic, inaccurate, contradictory and at times simply wrong.

Example

Maje Malepe may be a successful salesman because he is able to predict what most people will buy and knows how to influence their buying habits, yet he may be unable to persuade his children to apply themselves to their studies.

The same applies to the other three sources of knowledge. When one talks to people about how they see others and themselves, one can never be sure how reliable, accurate and honest they are. Our observations of others' behaviour as well as of our own are also incomplete, unsystematic and often inaccurate, especially as they are heavily coloured by our own subjective judgement and bias.

Definition

Personology is the branch of psychology that focuses on the study of the individual's characteristics and of differences between people. It therefore covers essentially the same ground as everyday knowledge of human nature, namely those abilities that enable us to say that we know someone well.

KEY TERM

everyday knowledge of human nature: the ability to judge, understand, explain and predict behaviour of fellow human beings

Personologists aim at improving such **everyday knowledge** about people by basing their theories on scientific methods. Personology may therefore be described as the formal scientific counterpart of our informal knowledge of human nature (Jordaan, 1993).

The most comprehensive elements of personology are to be found in the form of **personality theories**, which are the specific subject of this book.

Definition

A **personality theory** is the outcome of a purposeful, sustained effort to develop a logically consistent conceptual system for describing, explaining and/or predicting human behaviour.

The particular nature and purpose of this conceptual handling of human functioning differs from theory to theory, but it usually includes several of the following:

- an underlying view of the **person**
- certain proposals about the **structure of personality** and about how this structure functions
- ideas about **what motivates human behaviour**
- a description of **human development** and propositions about **ideal human development**
- reflections on the nature and causes of behavioural problems or **psychopathology**
- an explanation of **how human behaviour might be controlled** and possibly changed
- ideas about **how to study, measure and predict behaviour**.

KEY TERM

personality theory: the outcome of a purposeful, sustained effort to develop a logically consistent conceptual system for describing, explaining and/or predicting human behaviour

Most **personality theories** have been developed by psychotherapists, mainly on the basis of their rich experience with a wide variety of clients. Some theories, however, have emerged from extensive research involving the systematic study of a large number of 'normal' people. But in both cases, personologists make a thorough study of existing theories and research, and then try to improve the basis on which explanations of behaviour are made by reducing or eliminating gaps in existing theories. In addition, they constantly check their own theories against further observation and research and improve them wherever possible. It is reasonable to expect, then, that a personality theory can provide a better and more complete explanation of human behaviour than common sense can.

Activity

- Watch someone in a shop who is looking to buy something, for example a cell phone. Test your everyday knowledge of human nature by predicting which phone he or she will choose. Go home and write a report on how adequate your everyday knowledge was in predicting the behaviour.
- Write down the personality characteristics of someone you know well on the basis of your everyday knowledge of human nature. You could describe the same person again after you have finished studying an additional personality theory, and note how your newly gained knowledge influences your perception of the person's characteristics.

1.4 The reasons why there are so many personality theories

Why are there so many personality theories?

The many textbooks on personality theories reveal that there are more than thirty different theories, each of which has its own supporters and is studied worldwide. While this clearly shows that there is a profound interest in the subject, it also suggests that we are still far from proclaiming a 'correct' or generally acceptable description and explanation of human functioning. There are also other reasons for the great diversity of theories, a few of which will now be considered.

1.4.1 The complexity of humans and their behaviour

Human behaviour is a highly complex phenomenon that is determined by a wide range of interdependent factors such as biological factors; environmental circumstances; social factors such as other people's expectations; social milieu; culture; and psychological and spiritual factors such as emotions, religious convictions, values and goals.

A complete description and explanation of behaviour would only be possible on the basis of a thorough understanding of all the factors which determine behaviour, including the complex ways in which these factors interact with one another.

The complexity of human functioning could be likened to a multi-faceted diamond, with each personality theory highlighting but one of the many facets. Each personality theory therefore represents one possible explanation of human functioning as seen through the eyes of a particular personologist/theorist. A particular theory cannot provide the whole 'truth', but can contribute towards a better understanding of human functioning as a whole.

1.4.2 Practical and ethical problems in research

In order to conduct the type of research that would ultimately resolve the differences between the divergent theoretical viewpoints (Maddi, 1996), a researcher would have to investigate and manipulate every aspect of a large group

of people and their environments over a long period of time. One of the perennial controversies of personology, namely whether people are essentially motivated by sexual and aggressive drives (as Freud maintained) or by the will to find meaning in life (as Frankl believed), could be investigated experimentally. For example, people could be subjected, for lengthy periods of time, to severe hunger, thirst, sexual abstinence, and prolonged isolation and cruelty – similar to conditions in a concentration camp – in order to observe their reactions. Such research is, of course, impossible to carry out owing to practical and ethical considerations, so the personologist has to confine his or her research to random studies of people. Where controlled research studies do occur, they are still subject to limitations such as the size and representativeness of the sample, the duration of the study and the variety of behavioural phenomena that could be included in the study.

1.4.3 The large variety of assumptions concerning the person and scientific research

Another reason for the great number of personality theories is that there are many pre-scientific convictions about what humans are and about what science is, and the various personality theories are based on different assumptions concerning these matters. Since assumptions are convictions that are not based on scientific facts, it is extremely difficult to change them, especially in this field where it is already so difficult to find concrete evidence for anything.

To understand the various theories and to gain insight into the areas of agreement and disagreement between them, it is of the utmost importance to understand the assumptions upon which they are based. The basic assumptions that underlie each of the theories are discussed in the introductory paragraphs of each chapter.

Self-evaluation question

- The fact that there are many different personality theories can be explained in various ways. What do you regard as the most important reasons for this variety?

1.5 Definitions of key concepts

Which key concepts are basic to the study of personology?

Although most of the basic concepts in personology, such as *person*, *personality*, *character* and *temperament*, form part of our everyday language, personologists endow these concepts with specific meanings that do not always correspond with their everyday usage. It is important, therefore, to investigate their precise meaning and how they relate to one another.

KEY TERM

person: an individual human being who can act independently

1.5.1 Person

The word **person** apparently originally referred to the mask that actors wore in Roman times. (*'Personare'* literally means to 'sound through' and is thought to refer to the voice of the actor emerging from behind the mask.) In modern usage, however, the term refers to the individual human being. Viewed superficially, the word is almost synonymous with 'individual' and 'human being'. When analysed more closely, however, a subtle connotational difference emerges. 'Person' is more than a mere reference to an individual human being as the idea also implies independence of behaviour. In everyday language, we would not normally refer to a newborn as a person, although we would not hesitate to call it a human being.

This meaning is found particularly in legal terminology, where a legal person refers to an individual or a group of individuals, such as a corporation or a society, which can function independently. In psychological jargon the word 'person' is generally used in the same way as it is used in colloquial language and can thus be defined for our purposes as follows:

Definition

Person refers to an individual human being who can act independently.

This definition, especially the reference to independence of action, clearly implies an acknowledgement of the capacity for free decision-making. A non-deterministic view of the person such as this, however, is not shared by all personologists, and it is interesting to note that deterministic personologists like Skinner avoided using the word 'person' altogether and simply described people as '*organisms*'.

1.5.2 Personality

KEY TERM

personality: the constantly changing but nevertheless relatively stable organisation of all physical, psychological and spiritual characteristics of the individual that determine his or her behaviour in interaction with the context

Since the word **personality** is used in various ways in everyday language, it is necessary to analyse these different meanings to avoid confusion.

Firstly, in everyday language, personality is often used to describe the individual's social dimension. Someone said to have a strong personality could be someone who can use his or her influence or who impresses people easily. In psychological jargon, 'personality' is not used in this sense.

Secondly, personality is used in colloquial language to refer to someone's general behaviour patterns or his or her nature. Predictions are therefore sometimes made about someone's behaviour on the basis of his or her personality, or we say that some action on the part of an acquaintance confuses us because the behaviour does not fit in with the person's personality. This usage of the word conforms more closely to the way the word 'personology' is used here.

In personology, the word 'personality' refers to whatever it is that makes people who they are; in other words, that which allows us to make predictions about a

given person's behaviour, or the basis on which we can say that we know someone well. We can thus say that personality is the totality of all the *physical*, *psychological* and *spiritual* characteristics that determine the behaviour of an individual. Different theorists, however, have different views about exactly what kind of characteristics determine the person's behaviour. Behaviourists, for example, would not acknowledge spiritual attributes as being determinants of behaviour. In fact, an extreme behaviourist like Skinner avoids the use of the word 'personality' altogether, and would accordingly not be in agreement with the discussion that follows.

Note: Before we attempt a more formal definition of personality, a few important observations are in order:

- We should note that people show little or no change in some respect, while they are changing continually in other respects. A meeting between long-standing friends after a long separation will illustrate this. Some characteristics are relatively unchanged, and it is on the basis of these that the friends are able to recognise one another. But in many respects the friends will certainly have changed.
- It must be noted that an individual's characteristics do not exist or function in isolation. The person's attributes are integrated with one another in a complex way, so that they influence one another constantly. Even in a case where we could assume that two people are equally intelligent, for example, they will nevertheless reach different levels of academic achievement depending on their motivation, perseverance, interest and the extent of their involvement in other activities.
- It should be borne in mind that people always function in an environment with particular physical, social and cultural features, and that this context co-determines their behaviour. All of us know how the behaviour of our friends may vary, depending on the circumstances and who else is present, and the same applies to our own behaviour as well.

Taking all of this into account, we can now define personality as follows:

Definition

Personality is the constantly changing but nevertheless relatively stable organisation of all *physical*, *psychological* and *spiritual* characteristics of the individual which determine his or her behaviour in *interaction within the context* in which the individual finds himself or herself.

1.5.3 Some related concepts

To avoid confusion, 'personality' must be distinguished from a few related concepts.

Character

A concept that is often confused with personality is **character**. This term was used as a synonym for personality in psychological literature until about 1920, and the subject that we now call 'personality psychology' or 'personology', was

KEY TERM

character: those aspects of the personality involving the person's values

known as **characterology**. In current psychological terminology, however, the word ‘character’ has a narrower meaning and it refers only to those aspects of the personality involving the person’s values, and his or her ability to behave consistently in congruence with his or her values. It therefore has a narrower meaning than ‘personality’ as it refers more specifically to the spiritual and moral dimensions of the person. In current usage, when we say that the behaviour of a person does not fit in with his or her character, we mean that the behaviour concerned does not fit in with the person’s own ethical standards. When we say that the behaviour does not fit in with the person’s personality, then the meaning is broader. We mean simply that the behaviour is not congruent with the person’s usual behavioural patterns.

KEY TERM

temperament/nature:
emotional aspects of the
personality

Temperament and nature

The words **temperament** and **nature** are also used to describe people in expressions such as ‘He has a fiery nature’, or ‘She is a temperamental actress’. Both these words refer more specifically to people’s emotions and the way in which they express them and deal with them. Both thus have a narrower meaning than ‘personality’, in that they focus on the more emotional aspects of a person’s biological and psychological dimensions. ‘Temperament’, ‘nature’ and ‘character’ are different concepts, however, in that the first two refer to the inherited, biological aspects of the person, whereas ‘character’ refers to elements determined by socialisation and education, namely, the person’s moral attributes and values.

Self

A term which is frequently used in psychology and often creates confusion is the word ‘self’. It is, however, used in so many different ways that it is not possible to provide a single definition (Plug, Meyer, Louw & Gouws, 1986). It is sometimes used to refer to people’s views of themselves (Rogers, 1951); at other times it is a synonym for personality (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1984); sometimes it refers to the core of personality (Jung, 1959); and sometimes it refers to many other aspects of the personality.

Since the term is used in so many different ways in the various personality theories, further explanations will be given within the contexts of the relevant theories.

Self-evaluation question

- What do the concepts person, personality, character and temperament mean in psychology? Pay attention to similarities and differences between the concepts.

1.6 A variety of opinions about personality

Views of personality vary tremendously, and there is an equal range of opinion as to the precise nature of the interaction between personality and a given situation. Since the divergent nature of these opinions can be quite confusing, it is useful to have a systematic overview of the various viewpoints at the outset.

KEY TERMS

personism: the view that behaviour is influenced chiefly by the individual's personality

situationalism: the view that the situation is the most important determinant of behaviour

interactionalism: the view that behaviour is the outcome of the interaction between the individual's characteristics and the situation in which the behaviour occurs

1.6.1 Personality, situation and behaviour

Although all psychologists would probably agree that while both the individual's personality and the situation in which people find themselves influence their behaviour, there are differences of opinion as to exactly what role is played by each of these aspects. Some psychologists emphasise the role of the person, others accentuate the situation and a third group focuses on the interaction between the two. For the sake of convenience, these three viewpoints are termed **personism** (not to be confused with personalism, which refers to a holistic approach to the person), **situationalism** and **interactionalism**.

Personism

According to this viewpoint, behaviour is influenced chiefly by the individual's personality. Protagonists of this approach maintain that individuals have certain fixed characteristics or behavioural tendencies that distinguish them from each other. If someone has more of a particular characteristic than another person, a supporter of the personist view would expect the difference to be apparent in all situations.

Example

If, for example, Pat is more aggressive than Joan, who in turn is more aggressive than Zinzi, a personist would expect this rank order to manifest itself in all situations: Pat would always be the most aggressive, Zinzi the least, with Joan somewhere between them.

When stated in such simple, somewhat exaggerated terms, personism seems rather naïve and there are probably no psychologists who adhere to such an extreme view. There are, however, some theorists who come close to this extreme overemphasis of the role of personality compared with that of the situation. This is, for example, Freud's position when he asserts that all behaviour, including slips of the tongue and other maladaptive behaviours, are caused by unconscious drives. Freud's viewpoint is also known as *psychic determinism*. In a less extreme form, this viewpoint is shared by most psychologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It is also noteworthy that the practice of psychometric testing is, to a large extent, tacitly based on the views of (unspoken) personism. The idea that a person's characteristics can be measured in one situation, namely the test situation, and that predictions concerning his or her behaviour in other situations, such as a variety of work situations, can be made on the basis of the test results, is close to the position adopted in personism.

Situationalism

The view that the situation is the only or the most important determinant of behaviour developed in reaction to the somewhat extreme personism evident in the theories of Freud and his contemporaries. According to the most extreme form of situationalism, all people in the same situation would behave in the same way.

Situationalism is linked to the idea that all people are equal (which means that genetic differences are denied) and that it is the environment that shapes the individual's specific attributes. (This position is called *environmental determinism*.)

An extreme proponent of situationalism and environmental determinism was John Watson, the father of behaviourism. He asserted that he could make anything he wanted of a healthy child if he had complete control over the environment in which the child grew up (Watson, 1924). Skinner's extreme behaviourism also falls within this camp.

Situationalism therefore maintains that different people will behave in similar ways in the same situations, and that their behaviour will vary in similar ways from one situation to another.

In its extreme form, situationalism is, of course, untenable because it is perfectly evident that individuals react differently in the same situation. However, situationalists offer a simple explanation for this variation, namely that people have had different experiences in similar situations and therefore associate these situations with different past experiences.

Example

For example, some children have experienced success and fulfilment in the classroom, while others have experienced failure and anxiety. Therefore, they associate a classroom with different emotions and expectations. A classroom thus becomes a different situation for all children; while their individual reactions to the classroom differ, they also react in accordance with their previous experiences of the classroom situation.

This implies that both the situation and the person's characteristics play a role in determining behaviour, and this brings us to the third viewpoint, namely interactionism.

Interactionism

According to this viewpoint, behaviour is the outcome of the interaction between the individual's characteristics and the situation in which the behaviour occurs.

Example

In a given situation, for example on the hockey field, Joan might display more aggression than Zinzi, and Pat might be more aggressive than both Joan and Zinzi. In a different situation, however, for example in the classroom, Joan could be more aggressive than Zinzi or Pat. In a third situation, say dealing with an intruder, they could be placed in yet another rank order of aggression.

The interactional viewpoint therefore acknowledges the influence of individual differences as well as that of the situation. This simply means that different people react differently even in situations that might look the same to an outsider.

More specifically, this means that these differences in behaviour are seen as the result of both personality traits and differences in the situation itself, or in the way the situation is perceived.

KEY TERM

transactionalism:

behaviour is determined by the transactions between the person, the situation and the behaviour

This point of view is found in various guises, and these are given different names. According to one particular form of interactionalism, namely **transactionalism**, the issues involved are even more complex than suggested earlier, as the interaction is invariably threefold: between the person, the situation and the behaviour. The person reacts not only to the situation, but also to the behaviour that he himself or she herself produces in the situation.

Example

When a nervous employee is sitting in his boss's office, the behaviour of both is constantly determined by the process of transactions that take place between them. The boss may say something to the employee and immediately realise that what she has said is 'too threatening for this insecure man'. This may result in her changing her behaviour and saying something that sounds friendlier. Her behaviour is therefore being influenced by her perception of her own actions.

This transactional viewpoint has far-reaching implications for personologists, and will be discussed in more detail when we deal with the work of Bandura.

The interactional viewpoint also appears in other forms, namely as *systems theory*, the *ecosystemic approach* and the *ecological approach*. According to the interactional approach, humans are part of the physical, social and cultural environment, and their behaviour should be seen as the outcome of this entire system rather than as the product of the individual or of the individual in interaction with the observable, here-and-now situation. This approach, which is given detailed attention in the chapter on the ecosystemic approach, also has important implications for personology in that it maintains that the individual cannot be studied in isolation, away from his or her world.

Self-evaluation question

- In your opinion, what has the most influence on human behaviour: the individual's personality or the situation? Pay attention to personism, situationalism and interactionalism.

1.6.2 Personality theories: A systematic overview

How is the content of this book organised into the different parts and within each chapter?

Because there are so many personality theories, it is useful to organise the theories into a system of some kind. Because of the complexity of the theories there are many ways to do this. In this book we have simply classified the theories according

to their historical origin or ‘schools of thought’, namely the **depth psychological approaches**, the **behavioural** and **learning theoretical approaches**, the **person-oriented approaches** and **socially-contextualised approaches**. These categories also provide the book with its major parts.

Chapter 2 gives an historical overview of the origin and development of the different approaches, while a more comprehensive explanation of each orientation is provided in the introduction to each part of the book. The following is a brief summary, intended as an initial orientation.

Depth psychological approaches

Depth psychologists contend that behaviour is determined by forces within the person of which he or she is mostly unaware. These theorists, however, hold different views about the nature of the forces and the degree of conscious control that the individual can exercise over such forces. Some of these theorists, especially the earlier ones, emphasise the biological nature of the psychological forces, while others, especially the more modern ones, highlight the social nature and orientation of the psychological forces.

Behavioural and learning theoretical approaches

Theorists in this group have a totally different view. They emphasise the study of observable behaviour and consider learning and environmental influences to be the most important determinants of behaviour. Different theorists in this group offer various explanations for the phenomena of learning and environmental influence.

- *Extreme behaviourists*, like Skinner, contend that all behaviour and learning can be explained without any reference to needs or conscious experiences.
- The more modern group, comprising followers of the *social cognitive learning theory* approach, such as Bandura, acknowledges that learning can take place through the imitation of others, and that the individual’s cognitions play an important role in the learning process.

Person-oriented approaches

What the theorists in this group have in common is that they try to include and explain all aspects of the person in their theories. *Person-oriented theorists* view depth psychology and behaviourism as inadequate because these theories study only certain aspects of the person. Yet there are many points of difference between these theories as well, particularly with regard to identifying the overall goal of a person’s life. The existentialists, for example, hold that people direct their own lives through the ideals that they set for themselves. Rogers, however, contends that people naturally strive for the fullest development of their inherited potential, while Kelly emphasises the efforts humans make to predict events in their environment.

Socially-contextualised approaches

In this section of the book we discuss some ways of thinking about human functioning where the *embeddedness* of the person within social contexts is emphasised.

In the *ecosystemic approach* it is emphasised that individuals can only be understood as parts of the complex totality of more encompassing systems in which they are embedded. This approach plays a particularly important role in psychotherapy.

The chapters on *Eastern* and *African perspectives* provide specific examples of how social contexts impact on human functioning.

Self-evaluation question

- How would you summarise the essence of the approaches explained in the various parts of the book (that is, depth psychological approaches, behavioural and learning theoretical approaches, etc.) in one or two sentences? This task can be performed after having studied Chapter 1, and can be repeated when you have completed the book.

1.7 A closer look at personality theories

This broad overview of personology's field of study paves the way for a closer, more detailed look at how the individual chapters of this book are structured.

Earlier on in this chapter it was stated that a *personality theory* is an attempt to explain individual differences according to a model of human functioning. The task of the personologist can be compared with that of a motor vehicle expert who is commissioned by the editor of a car magazine to describe and compare different types of cars. To accomplish this task, the expert needs to have a workable model of the structure and functioning of motor cars. By referring to the model, he or she can make meaningful comparisons between car X and car Y. Cars are usually compared in terms of aspects such as engine type and capacity, fuel consumption, speed, passenger space, luggage space, safety, comfort and durability.

Personologists do not have such a handy and generally acceptable system of comparison at their disposal. However, although the contents of personality theories differ considerably, they do have certain characteristics in common and they all deal, more or less, with the same issues. It is thus both sensible and useful to describe and explain all the theories in terms of a common pattern, to the extent that this is possible and convenient. In this way the reader is able to compare the different views in much the same way as the car expert is able to compare different cars. A summary of the pattern that we have used in this book is set out subsequently.

1.7.1 Background

This introduction contains useful background information for the understanding of a particular theory. It includes the following: the historical background to the theories, biographical information about the theorists, the social and philosophical influences the theorists were subjected to, and influences arising from the theories.

1.7.2 The view of the person underlying the theory

Every personality theory is based on a certain *view of the person*, in other words certain assumptions about the nature and existence of the person. While not all theorists make their view explicit, each of them does have a general view of the person's nature and existence, and of the overriding direction of human life. These views are themselves embedded in an even broader worldview. For a theorist to be able to describe and explain human behaviour adequately, he or she must have certain opinions about or answers to such basic questions like 'What is the meaning of life?', 'What are human beings' primary concerns, or what is their behaviour directed towards?' and 'What is the human being's place in the overall scheme of the world?'. Freud, for instance, held that a person's behaviour is motivated by drives that are in conflict with the moral norms of society, and that behaviour is directed simultaneously at satisfying the person's drives while avoiding guilt feelings in doing so. Rogers, by contrast, contended that people basically are good and that their behaviour is geared towards the development of their full potential. Some theorists, such as Maslow, distinguished between two or more different levels of human functioning, namely a level of need satisfaction, and a 'higher' level at which people strive to achieve goals of their own choosing.

A theorist's basic view of the person is one of the most interesting and important aspects of the theory as it captures the theorist's ideas about the core of human functioning (Maddi, 1996); in other words, the theorist's view of what is common to all people. Once we understand theorists' underlying views of the person, we also understand their views of how all people function on a basic level. This makes it easier for us to understand how they explain other, more specific, aspects of human functioning, including individual differences. Theorists' views of the person, therefore, not only reflect their basic philosophies of life, they also, to a large extent, determine the essence of their entire theories.

1.7.3 The structure of the personality

To explain how the person functions as a whole, most theorists use certain structural concepts. They therefore present us with propositions regarding hypothetical basic units or working parts that make up the personality, and that work together in some way to produce behaviour. Personologists have various ideas about the *structure of personality*. Freud, for example, described three major structural elements (the id, the ego and the superego), each of which carries out specific functions; for Kelly it was enough to pinpoint only one type of structural element, namely constructs, which people use to understand their environment and to predict events.

1.7.4 The dynamics of the personality

A personality theory also has to explain what enables the personality to function or what motivates behaviour. In other words, a theory should explain the *motivating energy*, or what provides the drive in behaviour and how the parts ‘work together’. Here, too, there is a wide range of ideas in personality theories. Some theorists, like Jung, were content to describe only one form of psychological energy (the libido) as the basis of all behaviour, while others analysed and explained a large number of needs.

Because both *structural* and *dynamic structures* are used to describe and explain certain behaviours, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish clearly between these two aspects of a theory, and in some chapters they are not dealt with separately.

1.7.5 The development of the personality

As the person grows and changes constantly, most personality theories include a theory about *human development*. When a personality theory includes a complete developmental theory, it usually explains how the structural and dynamic aspects of the person develop and how children’s behaviour gradually changes until they reach adulthood. Personologists differ from one another regarding the factors they regard as the most important determinants of development. Another important point of difference between developmental theories relates to the question of the age at which development terminates. Freud, for example, holds that the essential aspects of the personality are completely formed by the age of six, whereas Erikson holds that the development of the personality continues throughout life.

1.7.6 Optimal development

Various personality theories include a description of the ideal personality. This element of a theory is closely related to the theorist’s basic view of the person and indicates what he or she regards as *optimal human development* or as the full realisation of one’s life goals. Although not all theories outline specifically what optimal development entails, in most cases one can make accurate deductions about their views in this regard.

1.7.7 Views on psychopathology

Most personality theories also include a theory about *pathological behaviour*. They explain how a psychologically-disturbed person differs from a mentally healthy person and how psychopathology develops. Some theories, for example Freud’s, were based largely on the study of deviant behaviour, and the theorists discerned little difference between disturbed and mentally healthy people. Other theories drew sharp, clear distinctions between healthy and pathological behaviour.

1.7.8 Implications and applications

Because personality theories attempt to explain all aspects of human functioning and to describe, in particular, the nature and development of the healthy and the abnormal personality, they clearly have important *implications* for psychology as a whole, as well as for the practical aspects of life. Personality theories contain useful information for every individual's own life, and may help people to develop their abilities and to understand themselves and others. However, the theories have special, significant implications for all those who work with people, including parents, teachers, nurses, clinical psychologists, counselling psychologists, psychiatrists and personnel officers.

In some cases, theorists are clear about the application of their theories, while in other cases they are not. There are theories, like those of Freud and Rogers, which are closely connected with specific therapeutic techniques, and there are those in which the therapeutic implications are not immediately evident. However, it is logical to expect that a theory that says that genetic and biological factors determine a person's development has totally different implications, say for the education of children, from a theory that says that environmental factors are the most important influencing factors for a person's development. This is so because an emphasis on genetic factors implies that it is difficult to change the individual characteristics through education or other environmental influences.

From this discussion it is clear that personality theories occupy a central place in psychology and, indeed, in all the human sciences. Consequently, in this book, particular attention is given to the *implications* and *applications* of the theories in the context of areas such as education, psychotherapy, society in general, measurement *and* research.

1.7.9 The interpretation and handling of aggression

The implications of the theories/perspectives/approaches for understanding and dealing with aggression are also examined in some depth. The aim of doing this is twofold. Firstly, to discuss the same theme/topic in terms of all the various theoretical perspectives, and in this way to point out the similarities and differences between the perspectives. Secondly, to investigate the relevance of personology with regard to current social problems in South Africa.

1.7.10 Evaluation of the theory

This highlights the most important positive and negative features of these theories. The purpose of this evaluation, however, is not to force the authors' opinion onto the reader, but rather to assist readers in forming their own opinions.



Chapter 2

Historical overview of psychological thinking

Henning Viljoen and Desmond Painter

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2.1 Outcomes

- Understand the most common **philosophical assumptions** and **methodological approaches** underlying the various personality theories.
- Explain the **genesis** and **early development of psychology** as a human and natural science.
- Explain the shift in emphasis which occurred in personality theories during the twentieth century regarding the **nature of human existence defined as an object of study**.
- Explain the significance of the rise of both **neurocognitive** and **critical theory** approaches to personality theories in the early twentieth century.

2.2 Background

Why is it important to place a theory within a historical context?

As no theory can exist in a vacuum, this chapter places the various personality theories in their historical contexts. Doing so permits better evaluation of the different theories' lacunae and of similarities and differences between them. Personality theories usually encompass a broad spectrum of general psychological thinking, as they cover every facet of behaviour – structural, dynamic and developmental aspects, normal, as well as abnormal functioning. The historical development of general psychological thinking largely reflects the development of thinking about personality (Schultz and Schultz (2016)).

In common with any schematic grouping and categorisation, it is not possible to create watertight categories or clear-cut developmental directions. The classification provided here makes use of established historical guidelines and criteria. Whilst the historical development of psychology is taken as a starting point, the history of psychology as such is not presented in any detail. Students who would like to know more about the historical development of the systems and approaches in psychology should consult works such as Brennan (2002), Hothersall (2003), Leahey (2013) or Richards (2010).

2.3 The genesis of psychology

How did philosophy and the natural sciences influence psychological thought?

Psychology is a discipline with a lengthy past, but as an academic subject in its own right it has a relatively short history. Psychological theories can be traced right back to the classical Greek philosophers, whereas the history of psychology as an autonomous science goes back barely a century and a half. It was first recognised as a laboratory science at the University of Leipzig in 1879, when Wilhelm Wundt established the first psychology laboratory there.

The period preceding psychology's establishment as a science is important because of the groundwork that was being done on its principles, methods and objects of study. This initial phase can be divided into two stages – one during which psychology was an integral part of philosophy, and one during which it was also part of certain natural sciences, particularly physiology and physics.

2.3.1 Psychology as part of philosophy (±400 BC–±1600)

The first forays into psychology can be traced back to the Greek philosophers Plato (427–347 BC) and Aristotle (384–322 BC) who laid down the basic principles of human behaviour, particularly with regard to the structure and functions of the soul or mind (*psyche*). These were later amplified by St Augustine (354–430), who tried to reconcile Plato's psychology with Christian doctrines. A similar attempt was undertaken by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), who tried to integrate Aristotle's thinking and Christianity. During this phase psychology was essentially part of religious thinking, and thus of philosophy.

2.3.2 Psychology as part of philosophy and of the natural sciences (±1600–1879)

After the Middle Ages and the decline of the church's authority – an authority which was founded entirely on faith – came the *Age of Reason*, which had the human being as its focal point. The human being and the world replaced God as the main topic of philosophical reflection, and human reason replaced faith. The fact that knowledge ceased to be linked to religion and faith brought about a veritable explosion of scholarship and the next two centuries saw the flowering of the natural sciences in particular.

Enrichment

You may find it useful to return to the *philosophical assumptions* and *methodological approaches* below as they are mentioned and referred to in the contexts of the various personality theories.

Philosophical assumptions

There are various philosophical assumptions about the relationship between soul and body that underlie the basic views of the person inherent in the different personality theories. There are also various assumptions in certain methods used to explain human functioning.

- **Monism:** This philosophical assumption sees a single aspect or principle as being absolute.
- **Materialism:** This is an example of a monistic point of view that recognises the body as the only manifestation of human existence. In this view, all objects and events, including psychological processes such as thinking, willing and feeling, are explained solely as observable physiological processes. *Materialistic monism* developed in psychology in tandem with the growing popularity of the empirical

method and led ultimately to *behaviourism* and *reflexology*. Materialism is at the opposite pole from *mentalism* and psychological trends in which psychological phenomena are treated as non-observable mental processes.

- **Mentalism:** This is also an example of a monistic view, which rests on the philosophical hypothesis that all psychological phenomena, such as thought, will and emotions, can be ascribed to higher, non-observable mental processes and should be distinguished from physiological processes. This view is expressed in some of the earlier schools of thought in psychology, which were embedded in the human sciences.
- **Dualism:** In contrast with monism, dualism acknowledges two principles or aspects of human nature, namely the physical and the psychological or mental. Dualism is reflected especially in the *psychoanalytical* and *person-oriented approaches* in psychology.
- **Parallelism:** This is a refinement of dualism in which the human psyche and body are acknowledged as two independent entities that function autonomously yet are parallel. Parallelism is a polar opposite to *interactionism*.
- **Interactionism:** This is the method of explaining human functioning that underlies Descartes' view of the human being. It rests on the philosophical assumption that bodily and psychic processes are independent entities that nevertheless engage in interaction with one another and they can, accordingly, influence one another. In later developments in psychology, the term 'interactionism' is used in different ways, being based on the assumption that humans interact as independent psycho-physical organisms with the social environment as an identifiable independent entity.
- **Transactionism:** This is a further qualification of interactionism, which does not regard the psycho-physical human organism as an independent variable in the environment, but sees individual and environment as mutually interdependent.
- **Mechanistic:** According to this approach, all physical and/or psychological phenomena can be explained in terms of the laws of cause and effect. The conditioning paradigm that underlies *behaviouristic theories* is based upon mechanistic assumptions. This kind of framework is usually associated with a determinist orientation.
- **Determinism:** This proposes that any given psychological phenomenon is determined by specific factors. Determinism contrasts with theoretical approaches that prefer to attribute individual functioning and differences to the operation of personal freedom and the human will.
- **Vitalism:** This is a philosophical assumption that psychological phenomena are brought about and maintained by an inherent power of some kind, such as the human will, that can be separated from the observable physical mechanisms of the body. Vitalism therefore contrasts with the mechanistic determinist approach. Dualistic psychological viewpoints are usually based on vitalistic assumptions in that they acknowledge a mind or a will that directs behaviour. The Greek philosophers and later the Scholastic thinkers regarded all behaviour as being under the direction of the mind, while modern *humanistically-inclined theories* see behaviour as being regulated by the will, which implies individual freedom.

KEY TERM

Empiricism: the philosophy of science based on the assumption that observation through sensory perception is the only source of true knowledge

Methodological approaches

- **Deductive methodology:** This method is based on a process of reasoning that proceeds from a known principle or a given assumption to an unknown principle or assumption. This implies that the reasoning proceeds from the general to the particular. The classic example of deductive reasoning is as follows: ‘All people are mortal’ and ‘Socrates is a person’ are premises from which it can be concluded deductively that ‘Socrates is mortal’. The advent of **empiricism** as a scientific philosophical orientation caused the validity of this methodology to be questioned.
- **Inductive methodology:** This is based on a process of reasoning that proceeds from particular conclusions or premises to general principles. This is in contrast with the deductive method. Inductive reasoning is most commonly used in analysis and synthesis and it forms the logical basis of the empirical method.
- **Qualitative methodology:** This methodology describes the qualitative nature of a phenomenon. It describes a phenomenon as it is manifested and its objective is to *understand* the phenomenon rather than to *explain* it in terms of the laws of cause and effect. It is more subjective than a quantitative methodology. *Psychoanalysis* and *person-oriented approaches* are, to a large extent, based on a qualitative methodology.
- **Quantitative methodology:** This methodology is designed to determine quantitative differences between phenomena by means of objective measurements. It attempts to explain phenomena by establishing their causes and effects. As such, this method is fundamental to *empiricism* and the *behaviourist theories* in particular make use of it.
- **Objective methodology:** This refers to a methodological approach whereby results can be verified by other observers. Theories of empirical verification are all based on an objective methodology.
- **Subjective methodology:** Here the results depend entirely on the subjective observation of a single observer and accordingly the results cannot be verified by another observer. The analysis of dreams, for example, is based exclusively on a subjective account of them. Most of the *psychoanalytical*, *humanistic* and *person-oriented theories* rely on a subjective type of methodology. Introspection is an example of a subjective method.
- **Nomothetic methodology:** Psychological events and processes are described by taking into account only general principles that apply to everyone, without attempting to accommodate individual differences. It is the antithesis of the idiographic method.
- **Idiographic methodology:** This method describes psychological events and processes within the individual, his or her unique make-up and functioning as the points of departure. As against the nomothetic method, which looks for general principles, the idiographic method focuses on the uniqueness of the individual. It is employed mainly in the *humanistic*, *person-oriented* and *psychoanalytic approaches*.

- **Hermeneutic methodology:** This originally referred to the system drawn from the body of knowledge used to interpret the Christian Bible. Responding to the claim that psychoanalysis is not a science because the theory does not rest on empirically verified hypotheses, modern proponents of psychoanalysis like Jacques Lacan (1968) and Paul Ricoeur (1970) tried to resolve this dilemma by not typifying psychoanalysis as a science, but as a method of interpretation; in other words, as a hermeneutic ‘science’. According to the hermeneutic method, human behaviour is read and interpreted in the same way as a literary text would be read and interpreted. Just as writers are not always aware of the hidden meaning buried in the texts they have written, so the behaviour of patients or individuals shelters hidden meanings that have to be constructed and interpreted by the therapist or researcher.
- **Constructionist methodology:** According to post-Second World War philosophers of language like Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009) and Michel Foucault (2002), language does not simply represent a reality that exists independently of it. Instead, our social reality, and much of our psychological reality, is linguistically constructed. What we perceive and experience as reality is mediated by what Wittgenstein referred to as ‘language games’ and Foucault ‘discourses’. Constructionist methods, such as discourse analysis, thus study the linguistic construction of multiple, often contradictory, social realities and their associated psychological categories and identities (Burr, 2003).

Psychology, however, was decidedly unready for scientific study and was therefore unable to develop into an independent discipline or to achieve recognition as such. The principal stumbling block was the definition of the basic nature of human beings as contained in the various philosophical approaches and assumptions about humanity. This meant that no object could be defined for psychological investigation and that the following questions could not be answered:

- Is the human being essentially just mind or just body, or both?
- Is psychology the study of mental processes or of physiological processes, or of both?
- How should the concepts of mind and body be described and how should these phenomena be investigated?

KEY TERMS

epistemology: a body of knowledge based on specific assumptions about the true source of knowledge

rationalism: the philosophy of science based on the assumption that human reason is the only source of true knowledge

In response to these questions, two currents of **epistemology** (a theory of the nature of knowledge) came into being during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These were *empiricism* and **rationalism**.

Definition

Empiricism is an approach to the philosophy of science that starts with the assumption that the only source of true knowledge is observation through sensory perception. **Rationalism**, by contrast, proposes that human reason is the only source of true knowledge.

These two epistemological points of view held significant implications for philosophies of human nature, which in turn influenced the development of psychology as a discipline.

How did empiricism and rationalism contribute to the development of psychology as a discipline and to its divided nature or 'split personality'?

Empiricism grew out of Francis Bacon's (1561–1626) resolve to find a new method of acquiring knowledge. Although the Greek philosophers recognised both the deductive and inductive methods of logical thinking, Bacon pointed out that knowledge had, to date, been gathered exclusively by means of the deductive method. It was his belief that this had a limiting effect on scientific endeavour. For example, the use of the deductive method had reduced the study of the nature of a human being (that is, the relationship between mind and body) to a set of *a priori* suppositions – intuitive assumptions incapable of being proved. From these assumptions, specific conclusions had been drawn regarding given aspects of human behaviour. The validity of this method rested entirely on the accuracy and relevance of the *a priori* assumptions and Bacon was of the opinion that an objective science of human beings could not be developed in this way. He believed that truly valid knowledge was attained chiefly by means of the inductive method. Only when all pre-established *a priori* assumptions had been eliminated and the scientist began to study human beings and their environments by means of carefully controlled observation, would valid, scientific knowledge about the nature of the human being be forthcoming. Generalisations could then be made on the basis of controlled observations, which would preferably be quantified. Bacon thus emphasised *empirical observation* (a systematic inductive method) as the starting point for any scientific investigation.

This work laid the foundation for the study of psychological processes as part of the natural sciences. In physiology, for example, it led to research into the relationship between the nervous system and behaviour in an attempt to provide an empirically verified basis for human functioning. In psychophysics it brought about a search for a quantitative basis of the relationship between mind and body. It is this tradition, which is carried forward in modern psychological and personality theories, that supports the objective–quantitative approach.

The *rationalism* of René Descartes (1596–1650) arose from the attempt to throw light on human nature and how knowledge is acquired. Whereas Bacon started with the external world and maintained that knowledge of it is acquired by means of controlled observation, Descartes started with the subjective world. For him, *subjective experience* and *conscious knowledge* of oneself were the basis of all knowledge – in the words of his well-known dictum, '*Cogito, ergo sum*' ('I think, therefore I am'). He proposes subjective experience rather than the external world as an essential precondition for knowledge because the existence of the external world, according to him, cannot be proved. Descartes came to this conclusion in his search for knowledge that was indisputably valid. In contrast with Bacon, who believed that a valid science was to be found in the objective, empirical observation of the external world, Descartes proposed that the existence of everything (including the external world) was open to doubt. Yet something or someone (I, the questioner) does exist,

whose existence cannot be doubted; there is a subjective reality and experience that cannot be questioned. Accordingly, subjective experience rather than empirical observation was, for Descartes, the foundation for valid knowledge.

In his philosophical system, Descartes distinguishes two levels of existence in the universe:

- There is the *physical world* consisting of observable matter that can be explained and investigated in terms of mechanistic laws and that led to the development of the natural sciences.
- There is the *mental world* made up of the non-material, non-observable processes of consciousness that are characterised, in particular, by the human faculty of reasoning and which led to the development of the human sciences (*‘Geisteswissenschaften’*).

Descartes applies this distinction to the relationship between body and mind. The *mind* (*‘geist’*) is the non-material, non-physical entity which, he says, is easier to investigate than the body because it can become known through self-reflection (subjective experience). The *body* is a physical, material entity common to both human beings and animals, which responds to the external world according to mechanistic physiological principles. According to Descartes, the study of body processes is the field of physiology, while the study of mental processes is the field of psychology. He was the first modern thinker to demarcate and describe the object of psychology as the study of human mental processes.

This work of Descartes, in direct contrast with that of Bacon, laid down the guidelines for psychology as an introspective (subjective) human science, which had as its central concern the examination of the higher processes of human consciousness. This tradition has been carried forward in modern psychology in those theories that support the subjective–qualitative approach and that emphasise purely human processes as psychology’s terrain.

In summary, empiricism and rationalism were of profound importance in the development of psychological thinking. These systems of thought not only influenced the final formulation of psychology as a science, but Cartesian dualism and the founding of the empirical method were also partly instrumental in the development of the ‘divided nature’ or ‘split personality’ of modern psychology. This dividedness can be observed in the fact that psychology is practised as both a natural science and a human science. It is also expressed in the different theoretical approaches that underlie the different theories:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • objective/subjective | • materialistic/mentalistic |
| • quantitative/qualitative | • mechanistic/dynamic |

The dividedness is reflected in personality theory by the psychoanalytic and person-oriented theories that are founded exclusively on the deductive–qualitative methodology and which represent a human science orientation, as against the behaviourist theories that rely more on an inductive–quantitative methodology and are more closely allied with the natural sciences.

Self-evaluation questions

- Discuss the respective influences of empiricism and rationalism on the development of psychology as a discipline.
- What is implied by the ‘divided nature’ or ‘split personality’ of modern psychology?

2.4 Psychology as a science in its own right

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the natural sciences achieved a number of breakthroughs that received worldwide acclaim and also established the natural sciences and the empirical method as the apex of scientific activity. It is against this background that psychology was acknowledged in Germany, in 1879, as a separate, independent science. This was largely as a result of the work of Wilhelm Wundt in his laboratory at the University of Leipzig.

It seems that psychology had two ‘beginnings’ or foundations. What were they, and how did they influence the development of psychology?

Although Wundt’s work is traditionally regarded as achieving, on its own, the establishment of psychology as a separate discipline, it should more accurately be attributed with only bringing about the formal establishment of the science of psychology. The origin of psychology can be traced back conceptually to two fundamental starting points:

- the traditional foundation provided by Wundt and structuralism within a strong academic context
- the foundation laid by Freud and psychoanalysis within a practical medical context.

Each of these ‘foundations’ gave rise, at the end of the nineteenth century, to specific systems in psychology in terms of which personality theories can be organised.

2.4.1 Wundt and the foundation within the academic context

At the end of the nineteenth century, intellectual and philosophical thinking in Germany repeatedly returned to the theme of *consciousness* and the nature and function of its processes. It was during that time that the natural sciences flourished, and together these factors stimulated the development of the two psychological paradigms: *psychology as a natural science* and *psychology as a human science*. This was the anchor for psychology as a separate science within the academic tradition. Although these paradigms both represent attempts to unite the ‘divided nature’ of psychology through the creation of a uniform science with its own methodology, one paradigm gave more impetus to a natural science approach while the other placed psychology within a human science orientation. Consequently, they tend to rather perpetuate the ‘dividedness’ that had started with Bacon and Descartes.

Psychology as a natural science

This paradigm arises from the work of Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) and represents a radical break with the earlier philosophically-oriented metaphysical psychology that had prevailed in Germany. Wundt and his followers, known as the *structuralists* (a scientific philosophical approach that aims to examine the constituent structural elements of phenomena – in this case, processes of consciousness), define psychology as the analytical examination of human consciousness. Following the example of biology, chemistry and physics, they also developed an experimental method of investigation specific to psychology – **introspection** – which was based on an inductive methodology.

KEY TERM

introspection: a method of self-observation under controlled conditions

Definition

Introspection refers to a method developed by Wundt as an independent scientific method, specifically for psychology. This method involves self-observation under controlled conditions. Wundt distinguishes this experimental introspection (*'Experimentelle Selbstbeobachtung'*) from subjective inner observation (*'Innere Wahrnehmung'*) which, he maintains, was used in uncontrolled conditions by Descartes and Locke. The purpose of this method is to construct a 'chemistry of consciousness'. In other words, it attempts to isolate the structural components of consciousness.

KEY TERMS

functionalism: a scientific philosophical approach that concentrates on the functions and dynamics of psychological functions

structuralism: a scientific philosophical approach that aims to examine the constituent structural elements of phenomena

Despite many flaws and criticisms of this pioneering work, it served as a powerful and provocative stimulus, and in particular generated a number of reactive new approaches. On the one hand, it led to the development of **functionalism** in America. Functionalism contrasts with **structuralism** in that it concentrates on the functions and dynamics of psychological processes rather than on the study of non-observable structural elements. This approach eventually culminated in *behaviourism* and is evidence of the growth of the natural science orientation in psychology.

On the other hand, structuralism also stimulated the development of the German 'psychology of thinking' and of *Gestalt psychology*, which came about as a reaction to the elementalistic (the tendency to reduce phenomena to their smallest constituent elements at the expense of a holistic view) nature of structuralism. This reaction precipitated the growth of a human science orientation within psychology.

Psychology as a human science

Franz Brentano (1838–1917) opposed structuralism on account of its reductionist, atomistic nature (that is, its reduction of consciousness and all that it entails into its component elements). Brentano held that psychology should be defined as the study of psychological processes that originate with the *human will*. In view of the fact that the will, or **intentionality**, cannot be studied by means of an experimental methodology, Brentano adapted the descriptive qualitative method to the study of psychological phenomena. It is on this account that he is regarded as the founder of the phenomenological approach in psychology. This approach uses description as a means of trying to *understand* psychological phenomena rather than trying to find causal links between them in order to *explain* them.

KEY TERM

intentionality: psychological processes can only be understood by focusing on the will or 'intention' underlying the processes

Brentano's work was particularly influential in the development of the Gestalt movement and of what is known as the 'Third Force' in psychology. The 'Third Force' represents the *person-oriented approach* in America and the *existentialist approach* in Europe, and reflects a human science orientation.

2.4.2 Freud and the foundation within a practical medical context

Sigmund Freud, a medical doctor with an interest in psychopathological manifestations, became the founder of the theory of human behaviour known as *psychoanalysis*. Freud's theory, which originated from his interest in neurotic behaviour disturbances, particularly hysteria, was initially entirely independent of psychology as it was practised and expanded in Germany.

Although Freud as a medical doctor was schooled within the natural sciences tradition, he showed little regard for the empirical approach in developing his theory of human behaviour. He made no attempt to test his hypotheses by means of independent verification. His theory is founded on his own subjective observation of the behaviour of his patients.

In spite of the subjective methodology that underlies Freud's theoretical system, it had a profound impact on the development of psychology as a discipline. Some of its effects are summarised below.

- The scope of psychology as a discipline was considerably broadened as a result of Freud's work. To the study of the processes of consciousness was added the examination of *unconscious* processes and phenomena.
- Up to this point, psychopathology had formed an integral part of medical science. Academic psychology had as yet shown little interest in bringing psychopathology within its compass. As a result of Freud's work with neurotic patients and the insights this afforded him into the psychodynamics of normal, as well as abnormal functioning, psychopathology was gradually established as a sphere of interest for psychology. Ultimately this led to the development of clinical psychology as a field of specialisation within psychology.
- Freud's views of human behaviour represent the first formal theory of the *structure, dynamics* and *development* of the personality. Freud may thus be regarded as the founder of personality psychology and, to some extent, of developmental psychology.
- The impact of Freud's *psychodynamic approach* was not confined to the psychological arena, where psychoanalysis was established as a significant theory and approach. Its influence spread beyond psychology to Western thinking in general and is especially evident in literature, philosophy and art.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, psychology had been established as an independent discipline and a rudimentary foundation had already been laid for the three most important branches of psychological thinking during the century, namely: *behaviourism*, the *humanist/existentialist* (person-oriented) *approach* and *psychoanalysis*.

Self-evaluation questions

- Discuss Wilhelm Wundt's contribution to the establishment of psychology as a science.
- What was Freud's contribution in establishing psychology as a discipline?

2.5 Psychology in the twentieth century

The early years of psychology's existence as a discipline in its own right, and its first growing pains, are associated with the establishment and growth of three central approaches – *behaviourism*, *humanism/existentialism* (person-oriented approach) and *psychoanalysis*.

How did behaviourism, humanism/existentialism and psychoanalysis, which developed during the first half of the previous century, differ and change in terms of defining their object of study and methods of explaining/describing human functioning?

These three approaches differ widely in terms of the scope of psychology, underlying views of the person and methodology. Notwithstanding these differences, the twentieth century has witnessed developments in all three approaches that to some extent reflect a broad common focus. These developments have taken place in different dimensions of psychological thinking. Important developments took place in personality theory in terms of aspects of human existence that are defined as the object of the study of psychology. Closely allied to this were changes in the variables used to explain or describe human functioning.

Four aspects of human existence can be identified:

- the human being as an individual (individual existence)
- the individual in relation to other people (social existence)
- the individual in relation to his or her physical environment (physical existence)
- the individual in relation to a transcendent environment (transcendental existence). (Van den Berg, 1973)

When we look at how the variables used to explain or describe human functioning have changed, we can identify the following shifts in emphasis during the previous century: from an intra/extra-psychic phase to an interpersonal, an interactional, a transactional and an ecosystemic phase, as well as transcendental influences from Eastern philosophies.

2.5.1 The human being as an individual

Initially the main emphasis in all the major approaches of the early twentieth century – *orthodox behaviourism*, *Gestalt psychology* as the forerunner of humanism/existentialism (person-oriented approach) and *orthodox psychoanalysis*, was on the study of individual behaviour. In other words, individual existence has been

the main focus of examination. The primary aim was to understand or explain individual behaviour and to demonstrate individual differences.

The theoretical approaches of John Watson (*orthodox behaviourism*) and Burrhus Skinner (*radical behaviourism*), the work of Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka (*Gestalt psychology*) and of Freud and Carl Jung (*orthodox psychoanalysis*) all concentrate on the behaviour of the individual. Certainly, there are differences as to where the variables that determine behaviour are located. Orthodox behaviourism locates these variables or determinants of individual behaviour *extra-psychically*, in the environment and in what can be consciously and externally observed. The reference to the 'extra-psychic' does not mean that there is any question of a two-way interaction between the environmental stimulus and the organism's response. The organism's functioning is always the result of a specific environmental stimulus. By contrast, orthodox psychoanalysis locates the variables *intrapsychically*, specifically also in the individual's unconscious. In other words, the variables that determine behaviour are all located in the individual's psychological structures, with no intervention from environmental influences. When social or communal influences were considered, as with Freud's superego, it was from the standpoint that the superego is an individually internalised structural component of the personality; in other words, intrapsychic. Even though behaviourism stressed the role of the environment in defining behavioural events, the focus remained intra-psychic: people (the organism) as individuals rather than as social beings.

This phase generated many new insights into general psychological processes, such as the behaviourists' investigations of the learning process, the Gestalt school's work on perception and that of the psychoanalysts on motivation. Psychoanalysis also paved the way for the division of psychology into an academic, theoretical discipline, and an applied science with *clinical psychology* as a specialisation within this subdivision.

Individual existence became a prominent concern again after 1960, with the development of *cognitive psychology* as an independent field of specialisation. This new emphasis on cognitive functioning may be seen as a direct expansion of rationalism and structuralism, which viewed psychology's terrain as the study of the individual's cognition and consciousness. Viljoen (1991) maintains that the excessive emphasis on cognitive factors during the sixties gained ground as a possible way out of the impasse brought about in psychology by orthodox behaviourism with its rejection of non-observable processes in human functioning. The view of the person as 'cogniser', on which cognitive psychology rests, is based on the philosophical assumption that humans are primarily cognitive creatures, and that all the other psychological processes, such as feeling and motivation, are subordinate to cognitive functioning, or even a product of it. Emotions and human will, for example, are regarded as physiological responses of the cognitive person.

This view of the person has given further impetus to the *man-as-machine paradigm* and the parallel definition of the human as an *information processing organism*. It has given rise to the concept of *artificial intelligence* and the dazzling prospects this

conjugates up of computers outperforming and in some contexts replacing humans as cognitive beings. ‘Cognitive restructuring’ – or the principle that changing an individual’s cognitive contents will lead to a change in behaviour – has become the foundation of many modern psychotherapeutic approaches. These approaches often embrace an objectivist understanding of the therapeutic encounter and argues for the standardisation (or ‘manualisation’) of interventions, replacing more subjective, interactive and dynamic understandings of therapeutic practice. Towards the end of the century, this tendency towards individualism in psychology – reducing social processes to intrapsychic levels of analysis, but also reducing the individual to an information-processing machine – had come under severe criticism from new developments in *social psychology*, *community psychology*, *critical psychology* and other approaches invested in a more contextualised psychology.

2.5.2 The individual in relation to other people

The next phase in the development of psychological theorising during the twentieth century may be termed the ‘social’ phase. It was at this time that sociology and anthropology were established as disciplines and Marxism was flourishing, in contrast with Darwin’s theory of evolution that had held sway in the minds of scientists over the previous few decades. In keeping with the prevailing ‘*Zeitgeist*’ the person tended to be thought of as a social rather than just a biological entity. This new spirit filtered through to all the psychological approaches and gradually the emphasis shifted from the person as purely an individual and biological entity to a person as a social being. The fundamental assumption was then that the individual as a person could be understood only when he or she was seen in a social context. It was during this phase that **social psychology** became established as a discipline and, in addition, this phase saw the proliferation of various socially-oriented theories. These included the *social learning theory* of Albert Bandura and Walter Mischel within the behaviourist tradition; the *humanistic, person-oriented theories* of Gordon Allport, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, the existentialist views of Ludwig Binswanger, Medard Boss and Victor Frankl; and the *socially-oriented psycho-analytical theories* of Alfred Adler, Erik Erikson, Karen Horney, Erich Fromm and Harry Stack Sullivan. In all of these the accent is on the person’s social existence and intra-psychic and extra-psychic models are replaced with interpersonal and interactional, or transactional, models.

The *interpersonal model* acknowledges the social environment as a variable that influences human functioning. This theme is particularly evident in social learning theory, socially-oriented psychoanalytic theory and humanistic, person-oriented and existentialist theories. The interactional and transactional models, represented by Walter Mischel and Eric Berne respectively, are refinements of the reciprocal nature of the interaction between the individual and the social environment. In the interactional model, the person and the social environment are regarded as independent variables that simply exert a reciprocal influence on one another. In the transactional model, person and environment are regarded as interdependent variables that cannot be defined separately from the transaction.

These categorisations are not wholly accurate for some of the theories. Fromm's theory, for example, could also be classified as person-oriented, while Frankl sees himself as a representative of the 'Third Viennese Psychoanalytical School'.

2.5.3 The individual in relation to the physical environment

A third development that took place in psychological thinking during the twentieth century was the situating of the individual within his or her physical environment. The focus was no longer on the person purely as a psychophysical organism or individual, nor was it on the person purely as a social being. The individual's physical environment and his or her relationship with it were now also taken into consideration. This led to the foundation of **environmental psychology** as a sub-discipline of psychology. Although to date there are few theories that deal specifically with this aspect of human existence, the groundwork has been laid by Kurt Lewin's *Field Theory* and George Kelly's *Construct Theory*. Kelly's theory also relies upon the interactional model to explain the interrelatedness of the individual and the environment.

The *ecosystemic model* is an extension of the transactional model. It goes even further in differentiating the environmental variable in order to provide for a complex network of interactional patterns that bring the person, the social environment and the physical environment into play as interdependent variables in explaining and describing behaviour.

2.5.4 The individual in relation to a transcendent environment

A recent development in psychological thinking is the positioning of the person in relation to a transcendent environment – a territory that had traditionally been reserved for theology and philosophy. One consequence of this development is the growth of the **psychology of religion**.

A significant outcome of behaviourism and the empirical experimental approach was that, for most of this century, psychology concentrated exclusively on behaviours by the natural sciences paradigm, with the result that phenomena such as religion examined empirically were not identified as matters for psychological study. Although the person-oriented theories that formed part of the human science paradigm made allowance for a transcendental relationship, it was only Viktor Frankl, preceded by William James, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow and Gordon Allport, whose theories identified religion as an integral part of a person's overall psychic functioning. Freud did pay some attention to religion, but regarded it as a neurotic manifestation. With this latter-day development and a renewed interest in a person's spiritual or transcendental existence, the spirit or psyche has regained its place in the conceptual framework of psychology.

With the renewed interest in the religious dimension of human existence, and the broadening of the empirical, positivist current in psychology to include a greater tolerance for a qualitative methodology, there is also more openness to Eastern and African perspectives in psychology. These perspectives, steeped as they are in religious traditions, could never have been accommodated in the strict, natural sciences approach to psychology. Apart from informing the development of **transpersonal psychology** as a subdiscipline, Eastern and African perspectives also emerged as a challenge to the ethnocentrism – which reveals itself as cultural biases but also, and more problematically, as Western imperial interests – at a time when psychology, a discipline that barely a hundred years ago was confined to Western Europe and the United States of America, had become globalised.

Self-evaluation question

- Discuss the shift in emphasis that occurred in personality theories regarding the nature of human existence defined as the focal point of the study of psychology.

2.6 Psychology in the early twenty-first century

Although the twentieth century saw a number of significant shifts of emphasis in psychological thinking, the divided nature of psychology was not resolved and continues to characterise psychology in the twenty-first century. The development of neuroscience, and especially sophisticated brain scanning techniques, has given rise to more than just the emergence of **neuropsychology** as one of the vanguard areas of psychological research in the first decade of the current century. Neuroscience is also increasingly positioning itself as a paradigm for psychology as such, leading to a resurgent desire to define and demarcate psychology in strictly natural science terms, and a consequent deepening of the reductionistic and individualistic tendencies of the behaviourism and cognitivism of the last decades of the previous century. From a neuro-reductionist perspective, psychology does not need the language of ‘personhood’ and integrative personality theories to be a science of human behaviour. The fantasy is that different behaviours can be mapped directly onto the brain, rendering theories of personality superfluous. Of course, not all versions of neuropsychological thinking are as extreme as this, but nevertheless, its emergence as a paradigm deepens the existing divisions between natural science and human science approaches to psychology.

KEY TERM

critical psychology: refers to a variety of approaches challenging mainstream psychology’s assumptions and practices in an attempt to apply psychology in a progressive way with the aim of social change

At the same time the early twenty-first century is also seeing the academic entrenchment of different traditions of **critical psychology**, deepening the human science tradition in psychology in important ways. Critical psychologists are both critical of psychology and invested in developing psychological concepts and theories that may be used to critique aspects of our societies that contribute to psychological distress, social alienation and inequality. Regarding psychology, critical psychologists of different orientations often focus on how the discipline’s scientific and universalistic pretensions hide ideologies of gender and sexuality

(feminist critical psychology), ethnicity and race (post-colonial critical psychology), and class (Marxist critical social psychology), to name only a few. Rather than a politically neutral objective science, psychology is deeply invested in and helps to uphold, according to critical psychology, a social order that is characterised by heightened individualism, but also by the depersonalisation and depletion of social bonds – the social order of consumer capitalism and its associated forms of social exclusion. For this reason, critical psychology is also opposed to any personality theory, even humanistic approaches, that fails to interrogate the extent to which its own concepts and categories may be used to obscure the irreducibly social situation in which people find themselves distressed, alienated, marginalised and exploited.

2.7 Suggested reading

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PART 2

Depth psychological approaches

Henning Viljoen

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Introduction to Part 2

1. Background

Depth psychology is probably the most widely known school of psychological thought, both within and beyond the boundaries of psychology. The key feature of this approach is the emphasis given by its followers to the ‘deep’, unconscious aspects of the personality. The school that gave depth psychology its foundation and which is still its most important branch is Freud’s psychoanalysis.

Depth psychology has played a somewhat unusual role in the history of psychology because it did not develop within the realm of academic psychology but of medicine, as a derivative of psychiatry. In fact, it took a long time before academic psychologists recognised depth psychology as a legitimate school of thought.

Freud is regarded as the father of depth psychology. Psychological thinking at that time, under the influence of Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) and structuralism, concentrated on *thought processes* and *conscious cognitive processes*. Freud shifted the emphasis to the unconscious and the non-observable content of the conscious. Accordingly, the unconscious as well as the deeper layers of the conscious were incorporated into psychology’s scope.

The fundamental hypothesis of depth psychology is that a person’s inner, subjective conscious consists of various layers that differ in their depth and in the extent to which they are conscious or unconscious. The layer at the surface of the conscious is experienced consciously while the deeper layers are unconscious. The deeper layers have a nature of their own and are governed by their own laws. Their influence on human functioning is of great importance. It is generally theorised that there is a tension between the deeper unconscious layer(s) and the layer(s) near the surface.

2. Forerunners of depth psychology

Even though 1893, which saw the publication of the work *Vorläufige Mitteilung* (‘Preliminary Communication’) by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Josef Breuer (1842–1925), is known as the year of the official birth of depth psychology, Van den Berg (1970) points out that a number of writers, philosophers, medical doctors and psychologists had already identified the *dual nature* of consciousness and postulated the existence of an unconscious.

According to Van den Berg (1970), the earliest reference to a duality in people’s psyche (that is, a distinction between conscious and unconscious functioning), is found in Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert’s 1814 work *Die Symbolik des Traumes*. Subsequently it appeared in the poetry of the English poet Byron and the German writer Jean Paul Richter. Richter was the inventor of the word ‘*Doppelgänger*’ (second

self or ‘double I’) which he used to suggest the existence of another ‘I’ within the individual. Later the Dutch writer and psychotherapist Frederik Willem van Eeden (1860–1932) also used the concept of a ‘double I’ in his work *Ons Dubbel-Ik*, as a way of drawing attention to the multiple layers of human consciousness.

In 1874 the Marquis De Puységur (1752–1825) discovered what is known as *artificial somnambulism*. It is a state induced by artificial hypnosis, during which the person can communicate with the hypnotist in intelligible language. De Puységur developed the method after seeing how Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) was able to heal people by ‘magnetising’ them. Mesmer achieved reasonable success in healing painful limbs by moving a magnet, and later only his hand, across the affected limb. Mesmer himself was probably unaware that he was using the technique of suggestion, which is the basis of hypnosis. A clear, scientific distinction between conscious and unconscious human functioning was, however, made only much later in the work of the French physician and philosopher, Jean Martin Charcot (1825–1893), and his student Pierre Janet (1859–1924). Charcot and Janet were also the first to use hypnotism to uncover the unconscious in the treatment of neuroses characterised by hysterical phenomena.

Hysteria is a disorder in which the person presents an organic symptom such as paralysis of the limbs, hearing defects, loss of eyesight, difficulty in swallowing and amnesia for which no organic cause can be found. The cause of this clinical condition was traced by Charcot and Janet to the unconscious. It was originally thought that hysteria occurred only in females, which accounts for the use of the term ‘hysteria’, which comes from the Greek word ‘*hystera*’ meaning ‘uterus’, to describe the clinical condition (Van den Berg, 1970).

During 1885, Freud worked for a year with Charcot and Janet at *La Salpêtrière* mental hospital in Paris. He was impressed with hypnosis as an effective method for the treatment of hysteria.

3. The origin of depth psychology

Depth psychology started with Josef Breuer and his work with the now famous patient Bertha Pappenheim, referred to in the literature as ‘Anna O’. Her symptoms included a paralysis and a stiffening of the right arm and leg, which later extended to her left arm and leg. These symptoms were occasionally accompanied by a disturbance of consciousness which caused her to appear as if she were in a trance or had hypnotised herself. Breuer found that in this trance state she could converse freely with him about her problems. In 1882, however, she presented a new symptom, *sitiophobia*, a condition in which the patient cannot drink anything. In a conversation about her new symptom, which took place when she was in a state of spontaneous hypnosis, it transpired that she had seen a woman drinking water from a glass without knowing that a dog had just had some water from the same glass. While she was talking about the incident, she experienced the same nausea she had felt when the incident had occurred. After she awoke from the

self-induced hypnosis, the symptoms disappeared and she could drink again. Using the same ‘cure by conversation’, Breuer also treated other symptoms that had been caused by some kind of psychological trauma in Anna O and other patients. He discovered that in talking about their traumas, patients experienced a catharsis which allowed the symptoms to disappear. The literal meaning of ‘*catharsis*’ is *purification* or *cleansing* and refers to an emotional abreaction or release of the traumatic experience.

The work carried out by Breuer greatly impressed Freud. On his return from his visit to Charcot in 1885, Freud worked closely with Breuer in applying hypnosis and catharsis to the treatment of hysteria. This collaboration led to their joint publication of the *Preliminary Communication* in 1893, in which they explained the method and indicated the importance of suppressed, unconscious material in causing hysteria. This publication was followed by a more comprehensive work, *Studien über Hysterie* (‘Studies on Hysteria’), in 1895.

Freud, however, gradually drifted further and further away from Breuer’s work. First he abandoned hypnosis as a treatment technique, gradually replacing this with his own technique of ‘free association’. He also began to place increasing emphasis on sex as the main cause of all psychoneuroses – a view Breuer rejected completely (Olson & Hergenhahn, 2011; Van den Berg, 1970).

In 1900 Freud published his first major work on his own, *Die Traumdeutung* (‘The Interpretation of Dreams’). This was followed by *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltags* (‘The Psychopathology of Everyday Life’) in 1901, which explained the basic guidelines of his psychoanalytic theory. The central idea in these books is that unconscious repressed thoughts, usually of a sexual nature, play an important part in determining human behaviour.

4. The development of depth psychology

Freud’s first publications soon brought him recognition as one of psychiatry’s major pioneers and he attracted to himself a considerable number of supporters, including Alfred Adler and Carl Jung. Since psychoanalysis was regarded as a radical school of thought in medicine, and was not readily accepted among physicians, this group founded their own psychoanalytical society. In addition, they published their own journal and organised congresses to disseminate and develop these new views.

But Freud’s insistence that his followers remain absolutely loyal to his interpretation of psychoanalysis caused some of them to break away from him. This was not always a painless undertaking, as Freud apparently had an extremely powerful hold over his supporters. Wilson (1984:101) points out that ‘... Freud seemed to have a frightening power of inducing suicidal depression in “heretics”’. Jung, for instance, was depressed for three years after his break with Freud. Herbert Silberer and Victor Tausk committed suicide after their differences with Freud and Wilhelm Reich suffered a nervous breakdown.

In 1911 Adler went his own way and developed his theory of **Individual Psychology** within the context of depth psychology. Adler's theory shifted the emphasis from Freud's stress on sexuality to people's striving for superiority and fulfilment, and their sense of community as the most important determinants of behaviour.

In 1914 a breach also occurred between Jung and Freud and this led to Jung's development of his own theory of *Analytical Psychology*. Jung redefined certain Freudian concepts and in particular formulated a deeper and more complex analysis of the unconscious. He also emphasised that a person has a spiritual dimension which strives towards the attainment of a self. According to Wilson (1984), Jung, unlike Freud, pointed out that man's religious drive was as strong as his sexual drive, and even more so as religious needs could often suppress sexual needs.

The upshot of all this was that by 1915 there were three rival schools of thought within depth psychology, namely:

- the Psychoanalysis of Freud
- the Individual Psychology of Adler
- the Analytical Psychology of Jung.

Each of these schools of thought had its own theoretical framework concerning human functioning and the human personality.

Apart from these early 'defectors' who struck out on their own, later developments in psychoanalysis are generally characterised by less emphasis on sex and biological factors and more emphasis on social factors in human functioning. This means that human behaviour was explained in terms of *interpersonal relationships* rather than *intra-psychic processes*. In addition to the classic theories of Freud, Jung and Adler, five further schools in depth psychology can be distinguished, namely:

- the orthodox Freudians
- the neo-Freudians
- the ego psychologists
- the socially-oriented psychoanalysts
- post-modernistic developments.

4.1 The orthodox Freudians

Ruitenbeek (1973) points out that there were a number of devoted orthodox disciples of Freud who made important contributions to the psychoanalytical theory without deviating radically from Freud's views. These included Ernest Jones, Karl Abraham, Hans Sachs and AA Brill. Ernest Jones was a lifelong interpreter and protector of Freud's theoretical views. His contribution to psychoanalysis was the organising and maintenance of the psychoanalytical movement and the writing of Freud's biography, rather than the development of psychoanalytical thought. Karl Abraham's work on melancholia was highly commended by Freud, and it highlighted an aspect of human functioning which is of special importance in therapeutic communication with the patient. As the editor of the psychoanalytical

journal *Imago*, Hans Sachs, an attorney by profession, did much to bridge the gap between psychoanalysis and other disciplines. He also made a significant contribution through his work on the relationship between psychoanalysis and art. AA Brill, an American, played an important role in translating Freud's writings into English and in publicising orthodox Freudian views in America.



Group photo of Freud and his followers 1909 in front of Clark University. Front row: Sigmund Freud, George Stanley Hall, Carl Jung; Back row: Karl Abraham, AA Brill, Sandor Ferenczi. Source: Public domain: Hall_Freud_Jung_in_front_of_Clark_1909

4.2 The neo-Freudians

The neo-Freudians include people such as Anna Freud (Freud's daughter), Melanie Klein, Sandor Ferenczi and Otto Rank. They kept to Freud's original idea of psychoanalysis as a starting point from which they could develop their own theoretical views. Anna Freud and Melanie Klein studied child development from a psychoanalytical perspective and applied psychoanalysis as a therapeutic technique in the treatment of children.

Sandor Ferenczi has the unique distinction that Freud did not break off his friendship with him even though Ferenczi agreed with only a few of Freud's orthodox ideas. Ferenczi disagreed with Freud regarding the part played by sexuality in the development of the personality, and maintained that the therapist should be much more active in the therapeutic process. Ferenczi held that it is insufficient love that causes neurotic attitudes and that they can be neutralised

only by a therapist taking on the role of the absent loving parent. This implies that instead of merely functioning as an analyst who analyses and interprets the patient's behaviour, Ferenczi wanted the patient to become a co-participant in the therapeutic process, allowing the therapist to reveal content from his or her own life and experience as part of therapy. This is in total contrast to Freud's idea of a neutral and uninvolved therapist (Ruduytsky, 2000). According to Kilborne (2008), Ferenczi has found favour amongst modern time relational psychoanalysts and followers of Jacques Lacan.

While Freud emphasised sexuality, Otto Rank regarded anxiety (especially *separation anxiety* as a result of birth trauma) as the most important determinant of human behaviour. This anxiety is apparent in the conflict between fear of life and fear of death which people have to confront throughout their lives. Life, in this context, refers to the unavoidable process of separation and individuation which starts at birth when the child is separated from the mother, and which continues throughout life as the child is weaned, or leaves home to attend school, or leaves its parents to get married, and so on. Death, here, means an innate striving for oneness, fusion and dependence. Rank was the first to propose that human development is a lifelong process based on the continual will to separate and the will to unify. It may thus be said that Rank reached back further than Freud to the birth process itself, in emphasising the influence of childhood experience on subsequent behaviour. His main disagreement with Freud, however, is his view that neuroses originate in the birth trauma rather than in repressed infantile sexuality. Rank also made a big contribution to the psychology of art and the artist. For him art, like religion, is to be understood as an expression of a person's will to immortality, transcending the fear of death (Thomson, 2008).

4.3 The ego psychologists

Ruitenbeek (1973) refers to the ego psychologists and the socially-oriented psychoanalysts as *second generation psychoanalysts* because they were not schooled directly by Freud and came into contact with his theoretical views in an indirect way.

Heinz Hartmann laid the groundwork for *ego psychology*, which was developed further by Erik Erikson. They did not deviate radically from Freud's views, but emphasised the development and dynamics of the ego rather than unconscious processes. Although Freud stated unambiguously that the 'ego is not lord and master of its own home' because it is always directed by irrational drives from the id, he did not exclude the possibility of rational ego control over human behaviour. According to Freud, the goal of psychoanalysis is to subject the id to the demands of the ego, as expressed in his famous dictum: 'Where id was, there ego shall be.' It appears that Hartmann and the ego psychologists took this statement of Freud's as the basis for their emphasis on the autonomy of the ego and rational control over behaviour. They replaced the dominant role of the unconscious in Freud's theory with the psychology of consciousness and a conflict-free ego, paving the way for the person-orientated approaches in psychology.

In contrast to Freud's psychosexual model for the development of personality and his emphasis on childhood experience as decisive for the formation of the adult personality, Erikson favoured a psychosocial developmental model covering the entire lifespan.

4.4 Socially-oriented psychoanalysts

Apart from Adler and Jung, there were also other theorists such as Karen Horney, Erich Fromm and Harry S Sullivan who, after their initial education in psychoanalysis, developed their own theoretical views, which were quite different from those of Freud.

Horney, Fromm and Sullivan did not agree with Freud in his emphasis on the biological basis of human behaviour. Nor did they accept the role he assigned to sexuality. They regarded social and cultural factors as the main determinants of behaviour and consequently their theories are known as the socially-oriented psychoanalytical theories. In view of Fromm's decidedly phenomenological point of departure and humanistic orientation, he could also have been classified among the humanists.

4.5 Post-modern developments

When it comes to post-modern developments in depth psychology we need to distinguish between the followers of Freud and Jung. Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan's work flowed from Freud's theory, while James Hillman's ideas are based on the work of Jung. However, there are common features in the work of these psychologists that set them apart from prior developments in depth psychology.

Their work contrasts sharply with that of the ego psychologists in that they put far less emphasis on the ego and the reality principle. They focus, instead, on the unconscious and the irrational, and the limits of human reason. For instance, Lacan goes to great lengths to subvert and complicate what Freud saw as the goal of analytical therapy: 'Where id was, there ego shall be.' He returns to an earlier view of Freud's – that the 'ego is not lord and master of its own home', since it is controlled by the id's unbridled impulses. To Lacan, human behaviour is largely determined and controlled by unconscious factors that obey rules of articulation that differ from linear reasoning.

Hillman also emphasises the role of irrational factors through his focus on imagery and imagination. For him, imagery and imagination form the bridge between the conscious and the unconscious, and he regards this, together with the process whereby the bridge is formed, as vital to the understanding of human behaviour.

Lacan and Hillman believe that a person exists only by virtue of the other or through the reflection of the self in the other. This belief profoundly affects their view of the ego, since it precludes or subverts the autonomy or I-identity of the

ego, making it decentred – even fragmented. For Hillman there is no place for concepts such as self-actualisation; the self takes shape only through and with the other. Lacan, by contrast, focuses on the threat posed by the other, and the corresponding development of a relatively autonomous self by working through conflicting relations of identification and aggression.

Both Lacan and Hillman use a unique poetic style that is laden with metaphors as an antidote to the sterile, scientific style of the positivists, which blurs the human being – especially the affective and irrational aspects of being human. With Lacan, we find a complex poetic style that reflects the content of his theory, while Hillman's style is a vehicle for making his work more human.

Post-modernistic developments in depth psychology, as represented by the work of Lacan and Hillman, are essentially a reinterpretation of the original ideas of Freud and Jung, with important implications for psychopathology, dream analysis and therapy. According to Tauber (2012:17), Lacan's 'return to Freud' reinterpretation shifts psychoanalysis from the medical 'cure' model to a 'science' of individual 'research' and self-discovery.

But both of them have a limited following in present-day psychoanalysis and analytical psychology. Thompson (2004) critically reflects on Lacan's standing within psychoanalysis by pointing out that although Lacan's theories were influential in France, they had very little impact in America.

David Tacey (2014), a former scholar of Hillman, supported by Winther's (1999) rejection of Hillman's theory that it is based on an outdated subjectivistic philosophy, maintains that since Hillman discarded all essentials from Jungian psychology in his *Archetypal Psychology*, he lost his appeal to most psychologists, therapists and training institutes within the *Analytic Psychology* tradition.

5. Current status of depth psychology

Although most of Freud's followers broke away from him because they could not accept his view of repressed infantile sexuality as the primary determinant of behaviour, they all continued, in one way or another, to ascribe an important role to unconscious factors as determinants of behaviour. Accordingly, the acknowledgement of unconscious, repressed material as determining human behaviour is the only factor that the various depth psychologists have in common and which distinguishes them from other schools of thought.

The scope of depth psychology is so vast that it is impossible to cover all the theorists who have contributed to it. Apart from Freud's own theory, preference has been given to theories that differ markedly from Freud's orthodox views, and to those that contribute to personology rather than to psychotherapy. The theories of Jung, Adler, Erikson, Horney and Fromm have been included in view

of their originality and unique insights into human functioning. Lacan has been included, not so much for his contribution to personality theories, as for his status as representative of post-modern developments in depth psychology.

Depth psychology is still a highly controversial school of thought in psychology, particularly since it does not comply with the strict empirical demands of an objective, scientific methodology. Unlike behaviourist theories, which fit within the positivist tradition in that their theories lead to testable hypotheses, many of the theories in depth psychology cannot be tested empirically. For instance, it is impossible to find empirical verification for a concept such as 'libido', which refers to energy that is not directly observable, or for the mythologically-based 'Oedipus complex', which puts forward an explanation for the process by which identity is formed.

However, despite the criticism of depth psychology, no comprehensive theory about human functioning can overlook depth psychology's ideas regarding the role of the unconscious. Although depth psychology may not feature prominently in traditional general psychology, it is unquestionably of great significance to psychiatry and clinical psychology. In addition, depth psychology has a widespread influence in other disciplines such as literature, art, religion and philosophy, as well as in lay circles. Marx and Hillix (1979) view psychoanalysis as a philosophy that has contributed to expand the lay vocabulary of psychology rather than a science.



Chapter 3

The psychoanalytical theory of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)

Werner Meyer & Henning Viljoen

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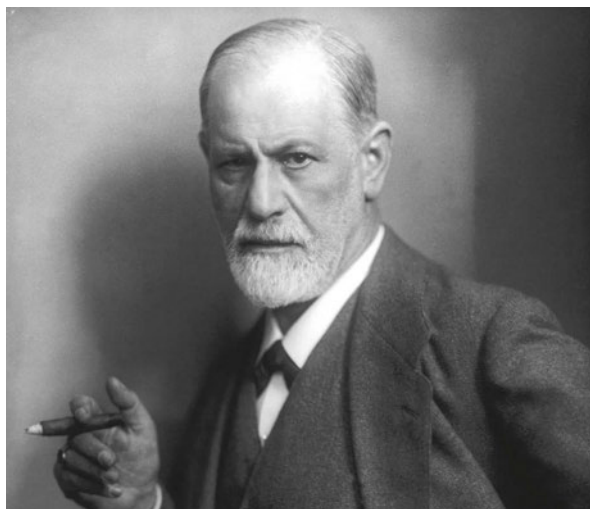
3.1 Outcomes

- Understand why Freud's theory can be classified as a **psychoanalytical, psychosocial** conflict theory.
- Describe Freud's **topography of the structure of personality** which consists of three structural properties (namely the id, ego and superego), and how these properties function on three levels of consciousness.
- Understand Freud's **deterministic drive theory** to explain human functioning.
- Grasp the important role that Freud allocates to **anxiety** and **defence mechanisms** in explaining human behaviour.
- Understand Freud's **psychosexual theory** in explaining the development of the person.
- Grasp Freud's view of **psychopathology** and **psychotherapy**.
- **Critically evaluate** the relevance of Freud's theory for modern day psychology.

3.2 Background

Freud's theory is usually considered to be the first personality theory and in many respects it is still regarded as the most comprehensive of all the theories about human functioning. Psychoanalysis comprises not only a well-known psychotherapeutic method, but also a detailed personality theory (with a developmental theory, a theory of motivation and a theory about the origin of psychopathological phenomena). It also includes theories about the origin of religion, art, social norms and taboos, and other cultural phenomena.

Sigmund Freud was born in 1856 in Freiburg, Moravia (now Pribor, Czech Republic) of Jewish parents and spent most of his life in Vienna, Austria. Here he went to school and then to university, where he qualified as a medical doctor. It was in Austria that he practised as a neurologist, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst for 45 years. At the age of 82 the threat of Nazism in Austria drove him to emigrate to England, where he died in 1939.



Sigmund Freud
Source: Public domain

How did Freud's own life experience, and the social and scientific contexts of his time, influence his theoretical thinking?

KEY TERM

Oedipus complex: a developmental stage where the boy identifies with his father and his own gender role

KEY TERM

death wish or thanatos: a destructive drive that serves to destroy life and underlies all destructive behaviour, such as aggression and violence

Freud's biographers (the most well-known of whom is probably Jones, who published his three-volume work between 1953 and 1957) like to speculate about how his own life experiences may have influenced his theory. One of the interesting ideas sparked by this speculation is the remarkable parallel between Freud's relationship with his parents and his thoughts about the phallic stage and the **Oedipus complex**. When Freud was born his father was already 40 years old, and his mother (the elder Freud's third wife) only 20. Freud enjoyed a particularly close, intimate relationship with his young mother, whereas his relationship with his father, who was somewhat strict and authoritarian, was cold and, at times, even hostile. As we shall explain more fully later, Freud believed that the young boy desires his mother sexually, and regards his father as a hated rival.

Another interesting conjecture has to do with Freud's theorising about an inherent but unconscious human drive to cause the body to die (the so-called **death wish** or **thanatos**). Freud's biographers like to link this controversial idea with the fact that he suffered from cancer of the mouth for many years, and with his experience of the First World War and the anti-Semitism of the Nazis.

Apart from personal experiences that influenced his theoretical thinking, it is especially important to take into consideration the social and scientific contexts in which he developed his theory. Freud's theory was developed on the basis of contact with neurotic patients who were drawn mostly from the higher social class of Viennese society. This Victorian background should be kept in mind while studying and evaluating Freud's theory, especially his over-emphasis of the role of sex in human functioning. In these higher circles all sexual matters were a strong social taboo. Neither sex nor any issues related to it could ever be discussed openly. The female body was entirely hidden by clothing, and all reference to the topic of sex (even pregnancy and birth) was avoided in polite and unmarried company. Women entered marriage knowing nothing about sexual matters, and ladies were not supposed to experience any sexual pleasure. Freud also studied in Paris with the psychiatrist Jean Charcot, who was one of the pioneers in the use of hypnosis, and who alerted Freud to the role of sex in human functioning and a possible cause of neurosis.

Perhaps Freud's own sexual conflicts also contributed to his emphasis of sex as a basis for human behaviour. He had a negative attitude toward sex, believing that the sex act was degrading and it contaminated body and mind. He occasionally suffered from impotency and stopped having sex at the age of 41. His personal sexual conflicts and problems led to a form of neurosis and physical ailments, which he described as anxiety neurosis and neurasthenia caused by increased sexual tension. To a certain extent he used his own neurotic experiences in developing his theories of neurosis (Schultz & Schultz, 2005:49).

Freud's theory must also be understood against the background of the historical context of ideas about science that prevailed during his time. In the late nineteenth century, natural science, particularly physics, was the model for all scientific endeavour. Freud was strongly influenced by his teacher, Ernst Wilhelm Brücke, a world-famous scientist forty years his senior. Brücke insisted on careful observation, experimentation and physical explanations of biological processes, reducing the functions of the mind also to physical laws. Consequently, Freud tried to build a dynamic mechanistic model of the person that would agree with the prevailing mechanistic view of the world found in physics. As a result, he saw human functioning as the outcome of energy usage, and described the human psyche – which for Freud meant virtually the same as the personality – by drawing an analogy between the psyche and the steam engine.

Although Freud's theory, for various reasons, is not accepted in its entirety by modern day psychologists (such as the fact that his pan-sexual ideas do not seem to be valid in a society where the sexual taboos do not exist), it nevertheless remains necessary for all psychologists to have a thorough knowledge of the theory. Firstly, much of the terminology used in psychology is based on Freudian concepts and, secondly, many other theories have been developed in opposition to Freud and cannot be understood without a sound knowledge of Freud's theory. In this sense psychoanalysis is fundamental to all psychological studies, whether one agrees with the theoretical model or not.

When studying Freud's theory one should keep in mind that he developed it over a period of about 47 years. During this time, from 1892 (when he published his first work) to just before his death, he constantly revised his views by incorporating new experiences in an attempt to explain ever more facets of human behaviour and experience. In this chapter, however, we will concentrate on his theory as it was finally presented.

Activity

Imagine a friend is joking about the fact that you still pay attention to Freud's theory, depicting it as 'a Victorian relic'. Defend the fact that you are studying the theory.

3.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

What are the basic assumptions underlying Freud's theory?

Freud's theory is based mainly on three basic assumptions about human beings and science that are vital to a clear understanding of his theory, namely, the *assumption of psychosocial conflict*, the *assumption of biological and psychic determinism*, and the *mechanistic assumption*.

3.3.1 Psychosocial conflict

According to Freud, the person is caught up in a constant conflict between drives within the psyche and the demands and norms of society. On the one hand the person has sexual and aggressive drives that demand continual satisfaction, and on the other hand, there are the moral prescriptions of society whose purpose is to protect society by controlling these drives. The result of this conflict is that the individual constantly tries to experience as much drive satisfaction and as few guilt feelings as possible. Therefore, Freud's theory can be described as a *psychosocial conflict theory* (Maddi, 1989).

3.3.2 Biological and psychic determinism

In line with the scientific spirit of his day, Freud describes human drives as physiologically based and rooted within the body. This makes him a proponent of *biological determinism*. He also states that the drives are localised in that part of the psyche, which he called the *id*, while societal rules are gradually absorbed into another part of the psyche, called the *superego*. This means that the conflict that essentially determines all behaviour takes place within the psyche, from which we may conclude that Freud's theory is also based on the assumption of *psychic determinism*, in that all behaviour is determined by forces within the psyche.

3.3.3 The mechanistic assumption

Freud accepted the dominant view of scientific thinking in his time, and consequently believed that human beings function in a mechanistic way. This means that the physical principles of energy consumption, conservation and transformation are regarded as valid for human functioning as well, and that the steam engine can be taken as a suitable analogy for psychic functioning. (The implications of this assumption are dealt with in greater detail under Freud's drive theory).

Self-evaluation question

- What does psychosocial conflict mean? Briefly explain which intrapsychic and social forces are involved in the conflict according to Freud's view.

3.4 The structure of the personality

According to Freud, how is the personality structured?

Freud assigns clear, definitive structural properties to the personality, which consists of three parts (the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego*), and according to him, functioning takes place on three levels of consciousness (the *conscious*, *preconscious* and *unconscious*). In fact, he distinguishes so clearly between the different structural parts of the psyche that he is often criticised for describing humans as if they consisted of three separate, autonomous persons. This however is not Freud's intention because he sees the individual as a unit consisting of three separate aspects that function together in order to attain three primary goals:

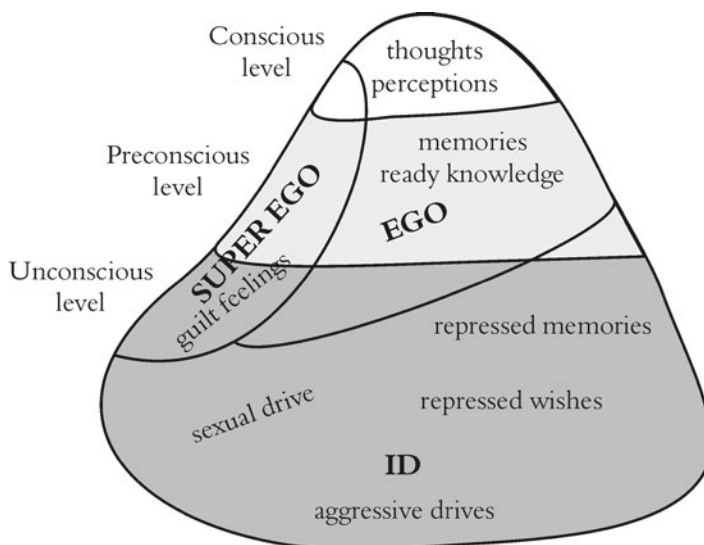
- To ensure the survival of the individual.
- To allow the individual to experience as much pleasure as possible.
- To minimise the individual's experience of guilt.

3.4.1 The levels of consciousness

Freud originally tried to explain human behaviour by distinguishing three levels of consciousness in the psyche, namely the *conscious*, the *preconscious*, and the *unconscious*.

- The **conscious level** contains thoughts, feelings and experiences, of which the individual is currently aware. For this reason the contents of this level change all the time.
- On the **preconscious level**, information is found that can be recalled to consciousness without much effort. This level consists mainly of memories of earlier occurrences that are not painful or anxiety-provoking, and experiences and observations on which the individual is not concentrating at any particular moment.
- The **unconscious level** contains the person's 'forbidden' drives, and the memories of events and wishes that cause the individual pain, anxiety and guilt and that he cannot recall to the conscious mind.

In the course of time, Freud found that the differentiation of the different levels of consciousness did not satisfactorily explain a person's complex psychic functioning, so he created further structural concepts. These new concepts, the *id*, *ego* and *superego* (Freud, 1961a, Vol.19) did not, however, replace the levels of consciousness. On the contrary, the levels of consciousness still played an important part in the theory. He asserted that the structural elements of the psyche



differ from one another in that they function on different levels of consciousness. The id functions almost exclusively on the unconscious level, although it can at times, make its wishes felt at the preconscious level (in dreams, for example). The ego and the superego function on all three levels of consciousness, although not to the same extent, as is clear from Figure 3.1. The individual's conscious experience, however, consists primarily of ego functions such as thinking and perceiving.

Figure 3.1 The structure of the psyche according to Freud Source: Freud

KEY TERMS

id: the innate, primitive component of the psyche that obtains the drive energy for all human behaviour in society

life drives or eros: serve to preserve life and are differentiated into two types: *ego drives* (which are in service of the individual's survival) and *sexual drives* (which ensure the survival of the species)

3.4.2 The id

The **id** is the innate, primitive component of the psyche (*'id'* is the Latin word for 'it') and is in direct contact with the body, from which it obtains energy for all behaviour. This energy is linked to the drives, namely the **life drives** or **eros** (including the sex drive) and the **death drive** or **thanatos**, which are contained in the id. (The drives are discussed in greater detail under Freud's drive theory.)

The id functions according to the *primary processes* and the *pleasure principle*. This means that it seeks immediate and complete satisfaction of its drives without considering anything but its own immediate pleasure. The term 'primary processes' indicate that the id is not capable of any thought, self-reflection or planning. The id is therefore wholly selfish and unrealistic. Indeed, it has no contact with external reality and is therefore not geared towards actual drive satisfaction, because it is incapable of finding appropriate objects in the environment that could satisfy its drives. The only form of drive satisfaction the id is able to accomplish is wish fulfilment. This consists of creating images of the desired objects and fantasising that they have appeased the drive. However, hunger must be satisfied with real, not imagined, food if the individual is to survive, and this requires the development of a reality-oriented subsystem of the personality, namely the ego.

3.4.3 The ego

The **ego** develops from the id because it is necessary to ensure the individual's survival, and it is formed through the individual's contact with the outside world. The ego's job is to serve the id's needs by finding suitable objects for real drive satisfaction, but it uses different means from those used by the id: it functions according to the *secondary process* and the *reality principle*.

- **The secondary process:** This means that the ego evaluates and weighs up a situation before any action is undertaken. Unlike the id, which insists upon immediate drive satisfaction (primary process), the ego is therefore able to reflect upon and plan the satisfaction of drives, and to postpone satisfaction to an appropriate time and situation (secondary process).
- **The reality principle:** This contains the idea that the ego takes physical and social reality into account by using conscious and preconscious cognitive processes such as sensory perception, rational thinking, memory and learning. Instead of the id's futile attempts at drive satisfaction by means of fantasy and wish fulfilment, the ego uses reality testing, object choice and object *cathexis*, which means that the ego tries to establish on rational grounds whether or not an object is serviceable.

When appropriate objects for drive satisfaction are found, they are invested with psychic energy. Freud actually uses the military metaphor of occupation or **cathexis** in this connection. Just as a general sends troops in to occupy territory that he regards as important, so the individual places psychic energy upon objects that are attractive to him or her. Most modern explanations of Freud's theory

KEY TERM

ego: mediates between the id drives and super-ego demands. It is formed through contact with the outside world and serves the id's needs by finding suitable objects for drive satisfaction

KEY TERM

cathexis: the ego's investment of psychic energy in certain selected objects

use the metaphor of financial investment, which is perhaps more appropriate: the individual selects certain objects and, as it were, invests psychic energy in them (Freud, 1964a, Vol.22).

The ego's position as the executor of the id's wishes is an extremely difficult one. Not only does the ego experience constant pressure from the id, it also has to accommodate all the demands of the physical environment and the moral codes of society. With the passage of time, the ego learns to take the demands of physical and social reality into account when it selects appropriate objects. It learns, for example, that some substances are edible while others are not, and that certain objects, actions, times and situations are not regarded by society as suitable or morally acceptable for the satisfaction of certain drives. (This moral aspect of the ego eventually becomes autonomous and Freud terms this the *superego*.) The ego can therefore be described as the executive official who operates in terms of three briefs, namely those of the id, physical reality and the superego (which represents society's moral codes).

The id threatens the ego with tension and discomfort if the drives are not satisfied. The superego threatens the ego with punishment and guilt, while physical reality does not always provide satisfactory objects for drive satisfaction and sometimes even presents physical dangers. It is, however, the conflicting demands of the id and the superego that cause psychic difficulties for the ego.

The ego, which functions on all three levels of consciousness, uses energy that is derived from the id, more specifically from the so-called 'ego drives'. The ego begins to develop during the first year of life and continues to change throughout a person's life in that it learns through experience, learns new ways of drive satisfaction, and learns to adapt to changing id drives and circumstances in physical and social reality (see 'The development of the personality').

3.4.4 The superego

KEY TERM

superego: the intrapsychic representative of society's moral codes. It serves to pressurise the ego into abiding by these codes

The **superego** develops from the ego. This happens through a complicated process in which the behavioural and moral codes of society play an important role. (This developmental process is explained in more detail in 'The development of the personality'.) The superego is active within the person (that is, intra-psychically) as a representative of society's moral codes and serves to pressurise the individual into abiding by these codes. It functions according to the *moral principle*, that is, it punishes the individual by making him or her feel guilty about immoral wishes and behaviour and holds up a relentless, perfectionistic ideal of moral behaviour. Freud calls the punishing element of the superego the *conscience* and the positive dimension which encourages moral behaviour, the *ego-ideal*.

Through the conscience and ego-ideal, the superego exercises a constant and inexorable pressure on the ego. Exercising such pressure requires energy which, like the ego, it obtains from the id, more specifically from the aggressive drive (which Freud calls the death drive or *thanatos*). To follow this train of thought,

it is necessary to bear in mind the mechanistic assumptions underlying his theory. The superego functions on all of the conscious levels, with the result that the person may feel (consciously) guilty about drives and wishes that occur even on the preconscious level. According to the moral principle of the superego, the conscious experience of a forbidden wish or thought is as reprehensible as the action itself. The result of this is that the superego pressurises the ego to keep forbidden drives and thoughts at an unconscious level.

KEY TERM

anticathexis: the moral taboo placed on an object by the superego

Freud uses the term **anticathexis** to refer to the moral taboo placed on an object by the superego. Anticathexis takes place when the ego blocks or represses the unacceptable cathexis desires of the id. Individuals are all constantly subjected to simultaneous cathexis and anticathexis of objects (for example, when a person has sexual desires and realises, at the same time, that his or her desire is unacceptable) and they experience this as anxiety (Freud, 1964a, Vol.22)). To protect oneself from this anxiety, a person develops anxiety and various defence mechanisms. (See ‘The dynamics of personality’.) Freud maintains that all psychological problems, such as anxiety, conflict and neurosis, are based on serious conflicts of this nature.

Self-evaluation question

- Explain why the *id* could be seen as the driving force, the ego as the executive agent and the superego as the judgemental agent of the personality.

3.5 The dynamics of the personality

How do the different parts of the personality work together?

Freud’s theory explains more aspects of human functioning than any other theory. Freud presents a detailed theory of motivation and studies how people try to deal with conflicts through the use of defence mechanisms, the causes and functions of anxiety, the functions and meaning of dreams, the causes and meaning of performance errors, and the development of neurotic behaviour and other psychopathological phenomena.

3.5.1 Motivation: Freud’s drive theory

To understand this theory, you should know how Freud uses the principles of mechanism, energy transformation and energy conservation to explain psychological functioning.

As we have seen, one of Freud’s underlying assumptions is the *mechanistic assumption*. He believes that the human psyche functions with the help of energy that is converted from a physical-biological form to psychic energy according to the familiar physical principle of *energy transformation*, that is, in the same way that steam pressure can be converted into electrical energy. Therefore, the drives that reside in the id, and the internalised moral code in the superego, both possess

transformed energy. (*Internalisation* is the process by which people make things such as attitudes, values and beliefs of others or of the community a part of their own personality so that they can cope with things better in future (Plug, Meyer, Louw & Gouws, 1987:161).) This energy can either urge the individual to act (to satisfy sexual desires), or torture the person with guilt feelings. Thus the individual has to cope with a conflict between two forms of energy: drive energy in the form of (forbidden) wishes versus moral energy in the form of guilt feelings. On the grounds of the principle of energy conservation, Freud further accepts that the energy attached to wishes and guilt feelings does not disappear of its own accord.

According to Freud, *drives* as psychological representations of energy derived from the body, are the main driving forces in human functioning, which not only motivate and propel the person to function, but also determine the direction of behaviour.

Enrichment

A word about the terminology

Two of the core terms Freud uses in his original German texts on motivation are 'trieb' and 'libido', which are often translated as 'instinct' and 'libido'. We have chosen to use 'drive' for 'trieb', partly because 'drive' is the more direct and correct translation (Freud, 1955b; Eidelberg, 1968), and partly because the term 'instinct' in modern scientific jargon refers to inherited behavioural characteristics, rather than drives. As far as the term 'libido' is concerned, we have decided to replace this with the phrases 'psychic energy', 'drive energy', 'sexual energy' or 'aggressive energy', depending on the context, because 'libido' has now come to denote many different things.

Freud's acceptance of the mechanistic principles has various implications. We shall discuss these once we have explained the general characteristics of drives and the different types of drive.

General characteristics of drives

According to Freud, all drives have four characteristics in common; namely a *source*, *impetus* or *energy*, a *goal* and an *object* (Freud, 1957b, Vol.14; Hall & Lindzey, 1978).

Source

Every drive has its source in the body, but the various drives obtain energy from different parts of the body. The source of energy for the hunger drive, for example, is the organs involving eating, such as the gullet and the stomach, while the source of the adult sex drive is the genitals and sex glands. The physical source of the sexual drives is usually referred to as the *erogenous zone*.

Impetus or energy

Every drive has impetus or, in other words, a certain quantity of energy or intensity. This is affected by the condition of the energy source at a given moment, and by the lapse of time since the last satisfaction of the drive.

Goal

Every drive has the goal of satisfaction. Goals are experienced subjectively as desires to accomplish something specific and the pressure of such a desire remains operative until the drive is satisfied. The individual is not necessarily aware of the drive or the desire, however. In fact Freud holds that many of the sexual and aggressive drives and wishes are experienced unconsciously.

Object

Every drive requires an object, that is, something or a person suitable for its satisfaction. Satisfaction is achieved by using the energy of the drive with the help of an appropriate object to carry out suitable actions. For example, the energy of the hunger drive is utilised in the act of eating (through which, of course, further physical energy is obtained), and sexual energy is usually utilised in sexual activities. An object for satisfaction is thus chosen by the ego and invested with psychic energy. This process of object choice, which is also known as *cathexis*, makes it possible for the individual to expend or to reduce drive energy (Freud, 1964a, Vol.22).

An important aspect of object choice is that objects can be substituted. The process of substitution, which is known as *displacement*, occurs when an earlier object choice is no longer available (for example, when a loved one dies), or when society, and consequently the superego, prohibits the use of a specific object (for example, when a child starts sucking a dummy or his or her thumb after having been weaned as displacement and longing for the mother's breast). Displacement plays an important role in human development and the dynamics of the personality. (See 'Defence Mechanisms'.)

It is, however, important to note that the initial object cathexis tends to endure because the individual remains attached to the original object even though it is no longer available for drive satisfaction. The substitute object is thus not as satisfying as the original object, with the result that unconsumed psychic energy may accumulate in the psyche and cause problems. The following analogy may illustrate this more clearly: Cathexis is like the forming of a channel along which drive energy is transported from the psyche to an object. When a person has to use a substitute object, the newly formed cathexis or transport channel is not as effective as the original, with the result that the drive energy starts damming up (Freud, 1964a, Vol.22).

Enrichment

Freud's theory of sexual drives from a neuro-imaging perspective

As a neuropsychanalyst, Stoleru (2014) investigated neural correlates for the four characteristics of sexual drives as delineated by Freud: source, impetus, goal and object. The results are consistent with the Freudian model establishing a neural basis for the sexual drives, with the exception of the source where some discrepancies were found.

Types of drives

Freud reduces all drives to the two basic inclinations of living organisms; namely to *develop constructively* and to *disintegrate and die*. Consequently, he divides drives into two groups; namely the life drives (*eros*) and the death drive (*thanatos*).

The life drives serve to preserve life and they therefore function in a constructive manner. Their role is to combine smaller units in the process of building larger, more complex units and thus follow the general biological tendency of cell-formation and development (Freud, 1955c, Vol. 18). These are further differentiated into two types; namely *ego drives* (which are in the service of individual survival) and *sexual drives* (which ensure the survival of the species). The *death drive*, however, has the general tendency to break down, to reduce complex cells to inorganic matter, and represents the tendency of the living organism to die (Freud, 1955c, Vol. 18; Freud, 1964b, Vol. 23).

How do the sexual drives and the death drive function psychologically?

(a) The ego drives

This group of drives is associated with individual survival and includes all drives that are aimed at satisfying basic life needs such as eating, drinking and breathing. (They correspond to what, in general psychological terminology, are usually called primary needs, except that Freud does not include the sexual need in this group.)

Although the ego drives are powerful and basic because individual survival depends on their satisfaction, Freud devotes little attention to them because the satisfaction of the ego drives is not so rigidly controlled by moral codes and hence does not cause conflicts of conscience and guilt feelings. The important function of the ego drives is that they are responsible for the development of the ego and provide the energy required for its functioning. Ego drives are clearly distinguished from the sexual drives in that:

- they are related to the survival of the individual, while sexual drives are related to the survival of the species
- they are not, like the sexual drives, associated with moral prescriptions and guilt feelings
- they provide the energy required for the functioning of the ego.

This line of thought was later elaborated on by a group of psychoanalysts who became known as ego psychologists.

Enrichment

Id, ego and ego drives

Boag (2014) gives a clarification of Freud's instinctual drive concept with reference to the id-ego relation, ego identification and identity, and ego drives and object relations. He also tries to bridge the gap between psychoanalysis as taught at universities and the theories as applied by clinicians.

(b) The sexual drives

Although the main concern of the sexual drives is the survival of the species, their primary function is, however, erotic in the sense that the satisfaction of sexual drives provides erotic pleasure, while the non-satisfaction thereof causes discomfort. According to Freud (1957b, Vol. 14), sexual drives are present in the child at birth, but they start functioning in service of reproduction and survival of the species only after puberty. Society, however, has strict moral codes concerning sexual behaviour (this was especially true of the Victorian era of Freud's lifetime), with the result that sexual drives constantly cause problems for the individual.

Freud holds that even small babies have sexual drives – *polymorphous perverse*– thus, they seek erotic pleasure from any part of their bodies. The bodily source of the baby's sexual drives is the mouth area, especially the lips and the inside of the mouth. The original object of the so-called oral-sexual drive is the mother's breast; therefore, it is satisfied by sucking the mother's breast. Of course, the baby suckles primarily for food, but Freud contends that a baby's inclination to continue sucking even after it has been satisfied indicates purely erotic pleasure and is an expression of the sexual drive. He argues that sucking the breast therefore satisfies different drives simultaneously; namely the ego drives of hunger and thirst and the oral-sexual drive (Freud, 1964a, Vol.22).

In the course of the child's physical development, other sexual drives emerge as other bodily parts become sources of sexual drive energy. (See 'The development of the personality'.) The satisfaction of all the sexual drives as they emerge in the course of development is either controlled or entirely prohibited by society. This means that the sexual drives create ongoing psychological problems for people and therefore play an important role right through people's lives. They also play a significant role in the development of mental disturbance.

(c) The death drive

Since Freud holds that all behaviour is caused by factors within the personality, he has to find an intrapsychic explanation for phenomena such as war, aggression, murder, suicide and death. The explanation he offers is that people have a death drive. While the basic function of the life drive is to build bigger and bigger biological units, the death drive's basic function is to break down living cells and change them into dead matter (Eidelsberg, 1968; Freud, 1964b, Vol.23). The original object of the death drive is the individual's body. The death drive is immediately brought into conflict with the life drives, and this conflict is projected outward in the form of aggression and destructive behaviour towards other people and things (Freud, 1961b, Vol. 21; Freud, 1964a, Vol.22).

The first externalised form of aggression manifests itself during the first year of life in the shape of oral aggression, for example, when the baby bites the mother during feeding (Freud, 1964b, Vol.23). This obviously causes the mother to interrupt her feeding, or to wean the child from her breast, both of which the child experiences as punishment. Freud points out that all aggressive behaviour, such as murder, suicide and violence, is regulated by strong moral codes, as is the case with sexual

behaviour (Freud, 1961b, Vol.21). Just as with sexual drives, these aggressive impulses lead to conflict between the aggressive drives and the moral social code incorporated in the superego. Once again, the individual has to find ways of utilising his or her death drive energy (which, like the sex drive energy, cannot simply disappear). Consequently, the death drive also plays an important role in the normal development of the individual and in the causation of psychopathology.

The death drive (which is sometimes also called *destrudo*) operates in various ways. Most commonly, the individual projects the energy outwards in the form of aggression towards other people or by destroying things. Freud ascribes all violence, aggression and destructive behaviour of any kind to the death drive. Through the defence mechanism of *sublimation*, however, the energy may also be exercised in socially acceptable ways in professions where objects are literally or symbolically destroyed, for example by butchers, carpenters or film critics (Freud, 1964a, Vol.22). Another way in which the death drive energy is used is in the workings of the superego, which Freud regarded as a form of aggression against the individual. Thus the superego uses aggressive drive energy by making the person feel guilty about his or her undesirable wishes and actions and causing pain through reproach. In this way the death drive is refocused on the individual in a secondary way (Freud, 1955a, Vol.8). Freud also holds that all forms of self-inflicted harm, such as performance errors (for example, when you accidentally hit yourself on the thumb with a hammer), accident-proneness and suicide, are the outcome of the unconscious operation of the death drive through the superego.

These attempts by Freud to explain behaviour demonstrate his position of psychic determinism, namely that all behaviour, even when it appears accidental or coincidental, is the outcome of forces within the individual.

Ultimately, however, the death drive reverts to its original object, in other words, the individual causes his or her own death. In death the individual achieves a totally tensionless state, *nirvana*, which Freud views as the unconscious ideal of all life. In his own words: 'The goal of all life is death' (Freud, 1955a, Vol.8; Freud, 1955c, Vol.18; Freud, 1961a, Vol.19).

Self-evaluation questions

- Describe the different types of drives and clearly distinguish between the ego drives and sexual drives.
- Explain Freud's use of the terms *cathexis* and *anticathexis*.
- Do you think Freud's pan-sexual view that the sexual drive is present from birth is justified?
- If Freud lived today after the so-called sexual emancipation and freer expression of sexuality, do you think he still would have ascribed such an important role to the sex drive?
- According to Freud's view that the death drive is inherently part of human functioning, does it mean that wars, murder and violence are inherently part of human society? What are your views on this issue and what are the implications if Freud's view seems to be correct?

3.5.2 Anxiety

Why do people become anxious?

KEY TERM

anxiety: the ego's reaction to danger

Freud describes **anxiety** as the ego's reaction to danger, and it stems from the conflict between the id's forbidden drives and the superego's moral codes. Anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling that motivates the ego to avoid the danger, thereby trying to reduce the anxiety. In accordance with the ego's submissiveness to the demands of the id, physical reality and the superego, Freud distinguishes three types of anxiety, namely *reality anxiety*, *neurotic anxiety* and *moral anxiety* (Freud, 1959b, Vol.20; Freud, 1961b, Vol.21; Rychlak, 1981).

Reality anxiety, which in current psychological terminology is called fear, is anxiety about actual dangers in the external environment. Although reality anxiety or fear can be intense and unpleasant, there is a possibility that the individual will be able to do something about the cause of his fear. The person may fight off, placate or drive away the dangerous person, animal or thing, or he or she may flee from the situation.

In *neurotic anxiety* and *moral anxiety*, the threat comes from within and the origin of the anxiety is partially or wholly unconscious. (See the given observation below for details of how anxiety arises from surplus drive energy.) It is highly difficult, and at times impossible, to deal with these types of anxiety; and according to Freud, they play an important role in all psychological disturbances (Kaplan, Freedman & Sadock, 1980). These kinds of anxiety, however, also play an important role in the life of every normal human being. People use defence mechanisms to deal with their anxiety, and they have dreams in which their forbidden desires are fulfilled.

Enrichment

Surplus drive energy and anxiety

Freud thought that surplus or unused drive energy is experienced as discomfort, tension and even pain and that this causes anxiety. If this anxiety is not dealt with it could ultimately cause neuroses (which are called anxiety disorders today) and other pathological behaviour (Butcher, Hooley & Mineka, 2014).

Since energy does not disappear of its own accord (according to the principle of energy conservation), society's prescriptions regarding the satisfaction of sexual and aggressive drives create serious problems for the individual. The individual's central, and constant, problem is therefore that he or she has drive energy that needs to be reduced through satisfying the drives. Society severely restricts the satisfaction of certain drives (namely sex and aggression) by means of strict moral rules. The individual's psychological problem thus consists of the conflict between his or her own selfish drives (sex and aggression) and society's moral code (which is represented by the superego). This means that throughout life, from the earliest years of childhood right up to death, the individual constantly has to cope with a surplus of sexual and aggressive energy, a condition that causes moral and neurotic anxiety.

It is not easy to differentiate between neurotic and moral anxiety, since in both cases the ego feels threatened by the conflict between the contents of the id and the moral codes of the superego and, in both cases, is not aware of what is causing the feeling of anxiety. In the case of *neurotic anxiety*, the ego fears, more specifically, that a forbidden drive, which has been unconscious up to that point in time, will appear in the conscious mind or that a drive will become uncontrollable, which would lead to punishment and feelings of guilt. In the case of *moral anxiety*, the emphasis is more on fear of the superego: the ego fears that the superego will punish it for a forbidden drive or action. This could be a drive or an action which the person experiences consciously or which has already occurred, and that has been relegated by the defence mechanism of repression to the realms of the unconscious. Although the person is no longer consciously aware of the drive or action, the superego and the ego are 'aware' of it on an unconscious level and the person experiences anxiety for something unknown. This vague, undefined nature of the object of the anxiety is characteristic of both neurotic and moral anxiety. The anxiety may be so upsetting and unmanageable that the person is compelled to develop a neurosis or a psychosis as the only way out of the unbearable situation (See 'Views on Psychopathology'.)

Self-evaluation question

- Which types of anxiety are caused by sexual and aggressive drives? Explain how this comes about.

What are the strategies used by people to fulfil their forbidden desires or to cope with their anxiety?

Under normal circumstances people use defence mechanisms, dreams and performance errors as strategies to cope with their anxiety and their unfulfilled desires.

3.5.3 Defence mechanisms

KEY TERM

defence mechanisms:
strategies that the ego uses
to defend itself against
the conflict between the
forbidden/repressed drives
and moral codes

Defence mechanisms are probably the most well-known aspect of Freud's theory, to the extent that his thinking in this regard not only enriched the terminology of psychology, but also endowed everyday speech with concepts such as **rationalisation**, **projection** and **regression**.

Defence mechanisms are strategies that the ego uses to defend itself against the conflict between forbidden drives and moral codes, which causes neurotic and moral anxiety. Since the mechanisms are attempts to cope with unconscious psychic contents, individuals are not conscious of the fact that they are using defence mechanisms, and are not aware of the deep-seated reasons for their defensive behaviour (Eidelson, 1968; Freud, 1961a, Vol.19).

Freud postulated several defence mechanisms but noted that a person rarely uses just one. An individual typically defends him- or herself against anxiety by using a variety of the mechanisms at the same time. There is also quite a bit of overlap between these mechanisms. His daughter, Anna Freud (1937, new edition 1993), developed her father's ideas, indexing several defence mechanisms from his works, eventually concentrating on repression, regression, projection, reaction formation and sublimation. Apart from differences, the defence mechanisms share two important characteristics. Firstly, they are denials and distortions of reality. Secondly, they operate unconsciously and they are geared to keeping anxiety-provoking material unconscious. Individuals are therefore mostly unaware of how they use them as coping strategies, which means that they mostly have distorted and unreal images of themselves and their environments on a conscious level (Schultz & Schultz, 2005:58).

(a) Repression and resistance

Repression is the basic defence mechanism that represses drives, wishes or memories that are unacceptable to the superego, to the unconscious.

Example

Peter is a young boy who experiences strongly aggressive wishes in relation to his father. These are in conflict with his moral views and therefore he banishes these thoughts to his unconscious so that he will no longer be consciously aware of them.

Repression is an unconscious mechanism and must be distinguished from the kind of suppression or avoidance of information that takes place when the person consciously and purposefully wants to forget. According to Freud (1961a, Vol.19:5), repression is the state in which ideas existed before being made conscious, and it is asserted 'that the force which instituted the repression and maintains it, is perceived as resistance'. Freud's conception is that repressed drives and wishes retain their energy and constantly try to break through to consciousness (Freud, 1964a, Vol.22). A single act of repression is therefore insufficient – it has to be maintained through resistance. Resistance becomes operative when repressed desires threaten to surface at the conscious level, thereby increasing anxiety.

As anxiety is an unpleasant experience, the individual resorts to repression and resistance, and then usually uses other defence mechanisms as well to ensure that the repressed content remains unconscious or, to put it differently, to bolster the resistance against unacceptable psychic content, which is trying to enter consciousness (Freud, 1959b, Vol.20). All the other defence mechanisms explained subsequently are geared at keeping repressed and anxiety-provoking psychic material unconscious. Their primary function is to support the ego's resistance against repressed material.

(b) Projection

Projection is essentially an attempt to keep unconscious and threatening psychic material unconscious by subjectively changing or projecting the focus to the drives or wishes of other people and thereby ignoring those impulses within themselves.

Example

Mr Welsh, who has the unconscious desire to see women naked (a voyeuristic desire which, according to Freud, can be traced back to the young boy's desire to see his mother naked), may accuse other men of having these desires. He now sees desires, which are actually his own, as the wishes of others.

One could also say that he tries to change either neurotic or moral anxiety into reality anxiety. He has now created a 'real' external danger in the shape of other people whom he experiences as threatening his moral values and whom he can therefore attack. In his attempts to do something about this situation, he may possibly use another defence mechanism, namely reaction formation.

(c) Reaction formation

Reaction formation is a mechanism whereby the individual tries to keep a forbidden desire unconscious by adopting a fanatical stance that gives the impression that he or she experiences exactly the opposite desire.

Example

Mr Welsh could, for example, begin a campaign against women who wear provocative clothes to entice men, or against the sale of 'girlie' magazines. Homophobia resulting in a campaign against homosexuality is usually an indication of reaction formation in a person threatened by his or her own homo-erotic desires.

A psychoanalyst would, in fact, suspect any fanatical or excessive behaviour as a possible use of reaction formation.

Example

When a woman overprotects her child (that is, she tries constantly to protect the child from all possible dangers), a psychoanalyst would suspect that she may have aggressive feelings towards her child, perhaps even a desire that the child should die.

Reaction formation frequently occurs in conjunction with other defence mechanisms, especially projection.

(d) Rationalisation

Rationalisation is a person's attempt to explain his or her behaviour, towards himself or herself or others, by providing reasons which sound rational, but that are not,

in actual fact, the real reasons for his or her behaviour. It is usually less threatening to blame someone or something else for one's failures than to blame oneself.

Rationalisation should not be confused with ordinary lying. When someone rationalises, he or she is not aware of the real reasons for the behaviour he or she is attempting to explain, whereas lying is something one does intentionally.

Example

The mother who overprotects her child would, for example, explain that her child is weak and sickly, while in actual fact the real reason for her behaviour is that she hates her child. Take another example: A student repeatedly fails his examinations and provides all sorts of reasons for this, for example, that the examination paper was difficult or the lecturer was incompetent. A psychoanalyst would consider the possibility that these reasons could be invalid and would suspect that the actual, unconscious reason could be that he hates and is rebelling against his father, and that this goes back to the phallic stage of development. The analyst would therefore suspect that the student's poor performance is aimed (unconsciously) at hurting his father.

(e) Displacement and sublimation

The mechanisms discussed up to this point are by and large ineffective. Although they are geared towards the alleviation of anxiety, they do not succeed in reducing the energy attached to the unconscious and anxiety-provoking sexual and aggressive drives. The cause of the anxiety therefore remains intact and forces the ego to keep up its defences. This leads to a vicious circle. Its enforced concentration on defence mechanisms hinders the ego in accomplishing its primary task, namely the satisfaction of the ego, sexual and aggressive drives. The ego therefore becomes all the more preoccupied with defence and becomes what psychoanalysts call a 'weak ego'. Ultimately the only escape is into psychopathology, for example, either by forming a hysterical symptom, or in the total loss of contact with reality through a psychosis.

A defence mechanism, which could be described as relatively successful, is *displacement*.

Displacement functions by finding a substitute for the object that society's moral codes forbid and using the substitute object for drive satisfaction. The psychic energy that was invested in the forbidden object is thus displaced to the substitute object.

Example

Displacement occurs as early as the first year of life, for example, when the child sucks his or her thumb or dummy instead of the mother's breast. Adults, however, also frequently employ displacement when, for example a man who is angry with his boss takes out his wrath on his wife and children.

Enrichment

This last-mentioned example, viewed from a psychoanalytic perspective, could be seen as the result of a complex range of defences. If someone often vents his wrath towards authority figures on his wife and children, a psychoanalyst would suspect the underlying anxiety-provoking drive to be more threatening than mere aggression towards his boss. Perhaps hatred and death wishes in relation to his father originating in the phallic stage of his development are the underlying cause of his anger. If the man himself explains his aggression towards his wife as resulting from the anger he feels towards his boss, he would be using rationalisation, because the real reason is his unconscious hatred of his father. Once again, this demonstrates how a number of different defence mechanisms may operate in a single behavioural act.

Returning to displacement, its relative success as a defence mechanism is due to the fact that some of the excess drive energy can be utilised by this means. However, the displaced object is never as satisfying as the original, instinctual object. Sucking on a bottle or dummy never provides the same sexual pleasure as the mother's breast. Every displacement leaves behind a residue of unused drive energy so it does not entirely solve the individual's problems. The problem is usually aggravated by the fact that society, after a while, also forbids the substitute object. A child is expected not to suck on a bottle or dummy after reaching a certain age. In some cases, this may cause the individual to seek new substitute objects throughout life. (Even the smoking habit, which is a form of displaced oral sexuality according to the psychoanalytic view, is placed under suspicion these days. Freud would certainly have associated this social rejection of smoking with society's moral codes. He would probably have said that society somehow 'knows' that the individual smokes as a substitute to sucking the mother's breast, and that that is the reason for regarding smoking as unacceptable!) Displacement therefore does not necessarily solve the individual's problems.

When displacement occurs within the therapeutic context, especially when patients feel the love or hate they felt towards their parents in childhood in relation to their therapist, it is called *transference*. (See 'Psychotherapy'.)

The most effective form of displacement, and therefore the most effective defence mechanism, is *sublimation*.

Sublimation consists of finding displacement objects and actions that are regarded by society as culturally valuable. When a person employs sublimation he or she expresses their unacceptable base drives in an acceptable or even valuable way, thereby raising these lower drives to something sublime.

Sexual drives could be sublimated by producing works of art, and aggressive drives could be sublimated by transferring the energy to acceptable aggressive activity as in sport or heroic deeds in times of war. In fact, Freud holds that all cultural activities are at least partly the result of sublimation (Freud, 1961a, Vol.19).

Example

A few examples will illustrate Freud's intention more clearly:

- Michelangelo liked to paint Madonnas. Freud would argue that in his work Michelangelo sublimated his sexual desire for his mother. He is also famous for sculpting naked male figures, thereby sublimating his homo-erotic desires.
- A scientist does research and discovers the secrets of nature: Freud would view this work as the sublimation of the scientist's childhood curiosity about the sexual activity of his parents.
- The work of the soldier, the butcher, the carpenter and the surgeon could be described analytically as the sublimation of aggressive drives. People in these occupations destroy things, but in such a way that their actions are viewed as culturally worthwhile.
- The behaviour of even the literary critic could be described as sublimation: the critic's written words are symbolic expressions of oral-aggressive and sexual drives.



Rugby could be described as the sublimation of the aggressive drive in a culturally accepted way.

Source: Shutterstock: 84594484

Sublimation is therefore effective in the sense that it maintains the repression of unacceptable desires and at the same time uses a great deal of the energy from the repressed desires without immediately leading to further social prohibition, as is the case with displacement.

(f) Fixation and regression

Two mechanisms which, for Freud (1964a, Vol.22), play an important role in the individual's development are *fixation* and *regression*.

Fixation occurs when an individual's psychological development becomes partly stuck at a particular stage. More specifically, this means a person behaves in a manner appropriate to an earlier stage, in an attempt to avoid facing the challenges of the next developmental stage. When, for example, a child who is older than one year continues to suck his or her thumb and resists toilet training, he or she may be described as fixated.

In terms of Freud's drive theory, this means that too much energy remains invested in the objects of a particular stage, energy that should have been cathected in objects appropriate to the next developmental stage. A fixation therefore has a retarding

effect on the child's total development. Furthermore, he or she will develop certain personality characteristics according to the stage where the fixation occurs. (See 'The development of personality'.)

Regression is closely linked to fixation and comes about for the same reasons. In fact, Freud holds that anyone who regresses will regress to the stage at which he or she was previously fixated.

Regression is a partial or total return to the behaviour of an earlier stage of development in which less anxiety and frustrations were experienced.

Example

For example, when a three-year-old child who has stopped sucking his or her thumb begins doing so again, he or she is regressing to behaviour of an earlier age.

When an adult becomes an alcoholic, a psychoanalyst would see this as a regression to the oral developmental stage, caused by the anxiety the person experiences as an adult. Furthermore, the psychoanalyst would contend that the individual reverts to oral behavioural patterns because he or she was once fixated at the oral stage. It is almost as if a part of the psychic energy belonging to the earlier stage remains fixated on oral objects (such as bottles), with the result that the adult reverts to those objects and behavioural patterns whenever he or she is confronted with problems he or she fears will overwhelm him or her (Rychlak, 1981).

(g) Identification

Identification is a rather complex mechanism, which can be fully understood only in the context of Freud's developmental theory.

Identification takes place when a person symbolically represents him- or herself with(in) another person, because of an unconscious desire to be like the other person. According to Freud, it is of special significance during the phallic stage of development.

Example

A boy's experience of the *Oedipus complex* (sexual attraction towards the mother and hatred of the father) indicates that he identifies with his father. This means that he wishes to be like his father in all respects, and imagines that he is his father. He wants to be as big, strong and manly as his father so that he can enjoy the same respect and love from his mother. The boy will imitate his father and assume certain of his characteristics, especially his moral standards, thereby developing a superego which represents his father's standards. A boy's identification with his father fulfils several functions:

- It keeps his forbidden sexual wishes concerning his mother and his aggressive and death wishes towards his father at an unconscious level.
- It enables him to satisfy his sexual wishes concerning his mother in his fantasies.
- It leads to the development of the superego.

(Freud, 1961b, Vol.21; Freud, 1964a, Vol.22).

Self-evaluation question

- Define defence mechanisms and explain why people employ them, according to Freud.

Activity

Try to find and identify applicable examples of the different defence mechanisms in your daily interactions with other people. Try to determine the reasons why the defence mechanisms are applied.

3.5.4 Dreams

Are dreams important and why do people dream, according to Freud?

According to Freud (1953a, Vol. 4 & 5), dreams, like all other behaviour, are produced by forces within the psyche. More specifically, dreams result from the repression of desires which, because of the influence of the superego, can be fulfilled only in a distorted way during sleep. Therefore, Freud believed that dreams represent, in disguised or symbolic form, repressed desires, fears and conflicts.

During sleep, the preconscious censoring function of the ego is less effective than when the individual is awake, with the result that the forbidden/repressed desires sometimes succeed in breaking through to consciousness in disguised form, where they are experienced in a dream. Freud distinguished two aspects of the content of dreams, namely the actual events in the dream (the *manifest content*) and the hidden symbolic meaning of those events (the *latent content*). Thus the forbidden/ repressed urges, called the latent dream content, undergo a transformation, which Freud calls *dream work*, to present themselves in disguised form as the manifest content of the dream. Important matters are thus sometimes presented in the dream as unimportant issues, and anxiety-provoking repressed wishes (for example, ‘I want to murder my father!’) are replaced by less anxiety-provoking thoughts or totally innocent events (for example, ‘I dreamt that the teacher became ill’). Dreams can also be presented as their converse (for example, the desire ‘I want to murder my father!’ changes to ‘I dreamt my father wanted to hit me’). Different wishes and fears may be brought together in the contents of a single dream (for example, the dream in which the father wants to hit the dreamer could represent three issues, namely the wish to murder the father, the guilt feelings experienced because of this wish, and the fear of castration). (See ‘The phallic stage’.)

These distortions in dreams prevent dreamers from recognising the real nature of their forbidden/repressed wishes, and this enables them to carry on sleeping. In this sense the dream protects sleep, unless the content is so anxiety-provoking that the dream censor is insufficiently effective and the dream becomes a nightmare. Dream work also continues even after the person wakes up, and causes the individual to forget the entire dream, or part of it, or to distort his or her recollection of it in some way.

KEY TERM

free association: a technique developed by Freud where stimulus words are used to which the patient must respond by revealing everything that comes to mind

Freud viewed dreams as the ‘royal road to the unconscious’ and dream analysis is much used in psychoanalysis to discover patients’ underlying problems. The analyst asks a patient to try to remember and recount his or her dreams. The analyst then asks the patient to use a technique called **free association**, developed by Freud. In this method, elements of the dream are used as stimulus words to which the patient must respond by revealing everything that comes to mind, irrespective of whether he or she regards it as apt, pleasant, proper or otherwise.

Freud also used his wide knowledge of Greek and Jewish mythology, as well as his experience with patients, in the interpretation of dreams. In due course he compiled a long list of dream symbols which in his experience always had a specific meaning. For example, he holds that elongated objects always represent the male genital organ (phallic symbol), and that when one dreams of rhythmic actions such as climbing stairs, this always represents sexual wishes (Freud, 1953a, Vol. 4 & 5).

Self-evaluation question

- Compare Freud’s view of dreams and dream analysis with the views of Jung and Adler.

3.5.5 Parapraxes

On a daily basis, we all make mistakes, slips of the tongue or *parapraxes*, which we normally regard as unimportant or insignificant. Parapraxes is an error in speech, memory or physical action that occurs due to the interference of unconscious repressed wishes, conflicts or thoughts surfacing to conscious. For example, we cannot remember the name of someone we actually know well, we have a slip of the tongue and say something we did not intend, we bump into a table, forget what we wanted to do, or accidentally hit a finger with a hammer. Freud does not regard any of these mistakes as accidental, because he holds that they are caused by unconscious desires and fears and that they are a mild form of psychopathology, which is found in every normal person – the *psychopathology of everyday life* (Freud, 1960, Vol. 6; Freud, 1957b, Vol.14).

Sometimes the reason is self-evident, as when we hurt ourselves ‘accidentally’. Freud thinks that such ‘accidents’ are usually the outcome of guilt feelings about repressed desires, which try to reach consciousness, and are therefore to be regarded as a kind of self-punishment. Freud often had to ponder for a long time on his own or others’ parapraxes, often resorting to free association, until he could find a complex explanation in which associations, memories and mythological events played a role (Freud, 1960, Vol.6). In all cases of ‘faulty behaviour’ or performance ‘error’, however, he came to the same conclusion that they were caused by underlying unconscious sexual and/or aggressive desires that were in conflict with the superego’s moral code.

Activity

If a person has a slip of the tongue, other people might remark, ‘Freud does not sleep’. Recall experiences of such parapraxes and try to determine the unconscious reasons or causes as Freud would have explained it.

3.6 The development of the personality

Why is Freud’s developmental theory referred to as a psychosexual theory?

Freud’s developmental theory focuses particularly on the development of the sex drive and on how society and the child deal with the accompanying problems. His theory is, therefore, often referred to as a *psychosexual* theory.

Freud describes the development of the individual as a succession of stages determined by maturation. Progression from one stage to the next is seen as the result of changes in the sources of sexual drive energy, and the name given to the different stages, such as the oral, anal or phallic stage, refers to the most important physiological source of sexual energy at that stage.

Although the overall developmental pattern is determined by biological maturation, Freud also ascribes an important role to the social environment, especially as represented by a child’s parents. The parents’ conduct has a profound influence on how well and in what ways the child will cope with the problems of each stage, and largely determines how successfully the child will progress to the next stage. While the broad pattern of development is determined by maturation, differences in social circumstances cause individual differences in the process of development and in the personality attributes that emerge. Freud (1961a, Vol.19) distinguishes the following development stages:

- *oral stage* (about the first year of life)
- *anal stage* (about the second year)
- *phallic stage* (about the third to the sixth year)
- *latent stage* (about the sixth to the twelfth year)
- *genital stage* (from puberty onwards).

Freud concentrates on the first three stages because he maintains that the individual’s personality characteristics are permanently fixed during this period. The first three stages also have the common characteristic that there is sexual development, which as yet has nothing to do with procreation, and for this reason they are called pre-genital stages.

3.6.1 The oral stage

During the oral stage, which ranges from birth to approximately the end of the first year, the lips and mouth are the main erogenous zone or source of sexual drive energy. When the child sucks on the mother’s breast, it is not only the hunger drive



A baby sucking at the mother's breast satisfies not only the hunger drive but the oral sexual drive too.

Source: Pearson asset library: AL488274

that is being satisfied, but the oral sexual drive as well. The mother is therefore a crucial figure in the baby's development. Weaning is accompanied by frustration of the oral sexual drive, and the baby experiences it as punishment (Freud, 1953c, Vol.7). Babies even experience interrupted feeding, or impatience on the part of the mother during feeding, as a rejection and as punishment for their sexual sucking actions.

Babies cope with these frustrations mainly by using *displacement* as a defence mechanism. Typical substitute objects for the mother's breast include a thumb, a pillow and a dummy. These objects, however, do not provide the same amount of satisfaction as the original object and, in addition, babies face society's gradual prohibition of these substitute objects. Therefore, every human being continually faces the problem of dealing with excess oral sex drive energy.

Excessive cuddling and mother love during this stage can also cause difficulties. The child could experience the transition to the next stage as a threat simply because he or she does not want to give up the pleasure and warmth of the present stage, and so remains fixated in the oral stage. There are at least three causes of fixation at this stage of development:

- A little boy who is too pampered by the mother and is given untrammelled freedom to satisfy oral urges will be reluctant to enter the next (the anal) stage of development.
- When a child is given little opportunity for drive satisfaction (as when a baby is weaned too soon), the child may experience frustration and become fixated.
- Fixation can occur as a result of any experiences that cause the child anxiety concerning the demands of the next developmental stage (as when a child is harshly punished or mocked for toilet mishaps, or when the parents demand too much from a child at too early an age, or set their expectations too high above the child's capabilities).

During the oral stage, however, parallel to psychosexual development, there is also development related to the death drive. The death drive, which is at first turned against the individual, is directed at external objects. The mother, once again, is one of the primary objects of this aggression and the baby sometimes expresses the aggression by biting the mother during feeding. Naturally the mother will interrupt the feeding or begin weaning the child, and the baby interprets this action as punishment. From the first year of life, then, aggressive drive energy, too, creates psychic problems (Freud, 1955c, Vol.18; Freud, 1964a, Vol.22).

Another important event during the first year of life is that the ego and superego start to develop in contrast to the id, which is inborn (Freud, 1961a, Vol.19). The baby starts to acquire knowledge about external reality and learns, among other things, that certain objects are edible and others are not, and that feeding takes place at certain times. This knowledge and experience lay the foundation for the

development of the ego. Through the manner in which their parents punish and reward them, children learn that certain kinds of behaviour are allowed and others are not, and in this way the first moral rules are absorbed into the superego.

Fixation or partial fixation in the oral stage results in a personality type, which Freud calls the *oral personality type*. The typical characteristics of this type are an inordinate dependence on other people, narcissism (that is, love of oneself), excessive optimism, and a tendency to be jealous and envious (Kaplan, Freedman & Sadock, 1980). As a result of reaction formation, however, such a personality can also evince the opposite characteristics, such as selfishness, self-loathing, pessimism and exaggerated generosity.

3.6.2 The anal stage

During this stage, which covers the second year of life, the anus and the excretory canal constitute the most important erogenous zone; in other words, this part of the body is the main source of sexual drive energy (Freud, 1964a, Vol.22). According to Freud, the child enjoys sexual pleasure in excretion, as well as in retaining excretion. Toilet-training is consequently of great importance in development and parents' handling of this issue has a profound influence on the personality characteristics which the child will take into adult life.

The aggressive urges also change during the anal stage (Freud, 1959a, Vol.9). The excretory function can be used for aggressive purposes, as when children excrete at the wrong time or refuse to excrete because they want to punish their parents. Children can also hurt themselves by retaining the excretion, but at the same time they can also derive from this retention a form of sexual pleasure that Freud calls masochism.



Toilet-training, which takes place during this stage, is another particularly important occasion for the incorporation of society's rules. The superego undergoes further development as a result of parents' punishment and rewards in the context of toilet-training (Freud, 1961a, Vol.19).

Fixation or partial fixation in the anal stage produces an '*anal personality*', characterised by traits that are related to toilet-training. This would include traits such as excessive neatness, thriftiness and obstinacy, or their opposites. Freud holds that, as a result of toilet-training, faeces (bodily excretions) come to be viewed by children as valuable items that can be 'given' to the parents, or that they can withhold to punish the parents (Freud, 1955c, Vol.18). For this reason, faeces have a symbolic connection with money (Freud, 1959a, Vol.9).

Toilet training is a particularly important occasion for the incorporation of society's rules.

Source: Fotolia: 61962541

The development of sadism and masochism (the tendency to derive sexual pleasure by hurting others or oneself), and the development of obsessive compulsive neuroses, are likewise associated with fixation in the anal stage (Kaplan, Freedman & Sadock, 1980).

3.6.3 The phallic stage

During this stage, which lasts from approximately three to five or six years of age, the development of boys and girls for the first time proceeds along different lines. Although this stage derives its name from the male sex organ (*phallus*, meaning 'penis in erection'), it is precisely the absence of this organ that is the basis of psychosexual development in a girl. The source of sexual drive energy can no longer be described as purely physical (as was the case in the previous two stages). Deep and complex psychic wishes are now the basis of psychosexual development, namely sexual wishes related to the parents, the penis and, in the case of girls, the absence of a penis.

For a boy, the penis is now the main source of drive energy. He often fondles his penis (Freud calls this behaviour masturbation), and according to Freud, he develops sexual desires in relation to his mother and would like to take on his father's sexual function. Because his father has a sexual relationship with his mother and because the boy realises he cannot succeed in replacing his father in a sexual respect, he becomes jealous and even feels acute hatred of his father.

The boy's masturbation, his sexual overtures towards his mother (such as peeping at her or getting into her bed), and his aggressive behaviour towards his father (such as outbursts of anger or articulated wishes for his father's death), all lead to ridicule and/or punishment. It is Freud's opinion that the boy experiences this punishment as a threat of castration, and he calls this experience *castration anxiety*.

The boy tries to cope with this maze of prohibited desires and intense fear, which Freud calls the Oedipus complex, by means of the defence mechanisms *repression* and *identification*. He represses his sexual and aggressive desires and his castration anxiety, and identifies with his father, which means that he wishes to be like his father. The boy would like to be as big, strong and manly as his father and therefore enjoy the love and respect of his mother.

This desire on the boy's part causes him to imitate his father's behaviour to the extent that he assumes some of his father's characteristics, especially the moral codes of society that are represented by the father. By means of this identification, the superego attains its final development. Freud once said that the repression of the Oedipus complex is the first great achievement of the superego and the final stage in its development (Freud, 1961a, Vol.19; Freud, 1961b, Vol.21; Freud, 1964a, Vol.22).

Enrichment

The Oedipus myth

Freud took the name Oedipus complex from Greek mythology. Oedipus was the name of a prince who left his city to circumvent the prophecy of an oracle; that he would murder his father and marry his mother. Fate, however, engineers it in such a way that, unbeknown to Oedipus, he kills his father and is rewarded by receiving his victim's widow, his own mother, in marriage. When he finds out the truth, he is so stricken with remorse and guilt feelings that he blinds himself.

Freud believes that the myth about Oedipus is a symbolic expression of real events that took place in humankind's earliest pre-history. In his book *Totem und Tabu* (Freud, 1925), Freud speculates that the first humans lived together in small groups with the father assuming the role of a tyrannical leader. The father owned all the women and his sons regarded him with envy and plotted to murder him to gain access to the women. These dramatic events, says Freud, are biologically transmitted as an unconscious memory. Freud thus regards the Oedipus complex as a kind of inherent unconscious complex that cannot be avoided, not even when parents deliberately try to prevent provoking the son's sexual and aggressive drives.

KEY TERM

Electra complex: a developmental stage where the girl envies her lack of a male sexual organ ('penis envy'), which eventually leads to identification with the mother and her own gender role

Girls experience a similar, yet clearly different complex, which Freud calls the **Electra complex** (Freud, 1961a, Vol.19). In the literature, it is also called the female Oedipus complex. Just like a boy, until the start of the phallic stage, the girl has a loving relationship with her mother as the person who cares for her and satisfies her needs. During the phallic stage, however, she observes that she does not have a penis, as a result of which she experiences anger and hatred towards her mother, whom she holds responsible for this defect. At the same time, she envies her father for possessing a male sexual organ (*penis envy*). The girl therefore develops sexual desires with her father as object because she thinks that she can acquire a penis from him.

As with the boy, these sexual and aggressive wishes remain unconscious as a result of repression. Identification with the mother causes the daughter to imitate the sexual role of the mother in the family. Because the girl is not subject to the great pressure of castration anxiety, she does not develop as strong and relentless a superego as a boy's (Freud, 1961a, Vol.19). Subsequent psychoanalysts, especially Karen Horney (1939; 1945; 1950; 1967), do not accept this hypothesis regarding the female conscience.

Fixation or partial fixation in the phallic stage is related to a large variety of neurotic characteristics (Kaplan, Freedman & Sadock, 1980). According to the psychoanalytic theory, castration anxiety and penis envy are at the core of most of the problems arising out of this stage, for example sexual adaptation problems in general and especially homosexuality (Rychlak, 1981). This stage is extraordinarily important in the genesis of mental disorders, because the superego – which is involved in all mental disorders – undergoes its major development during this stage: it is precisely an overly strict superego that can cause problems later on in life.

There are three main ways in which an overly strict superego can develop:

- If a father is too strict, the son may internalise the father's strict, rigid rules through his identification with the father.
- A child's superego may become unyielding in cases where the father is often or permanently absent.
- A harsh superego may develop when the father is not strict enough.

In the latter two cases, a strong superego will develop because the son cannot express sufficient aggressive drive energy outwards (towards the father), with the result that the excess of aggression is directed internally against himself. (One must bear in mind that the superego functions with the aid of death drive energy.)

3.6.4 The latent stage

This stage lasts from approximately five or six years of age to the start of puberty and is characterised by the fact that no new physical source of sexual drive energy comes to the fore. As a result of the repression of the Oedipus complex and the child's identification with the parent of the same sex, children of both sexes are concerned mainly with learning their gender role, and hence they show little interest in the opposite sex. During this stage, children play mainly with friends of their own sex because they want to consolidate their acquisition of appropriate sex-role behaviour. For this reason, Freud sometimes calls this stage the homosexual stage. He does not write much about this relatively problem-free stage.

3.6.5 The genital stage

This stage, which commences with puberty, is for Freud the final stage of psychosocial development and lasts until the end of a person's life.

Puberty is ushered in with physiological changes that increase the amount of sexual drive energy. The source of this energy is now the entire sexual apparatus of the individual, which includes the pre-genital sources (mouth, anus and phallus), as well as the sexual glands. This stage is characterised chiefly by a reawakening of the sexual wishes of the pregenital stages, particularly those of the phallic stage. The repression of sexual urges, which occurred during the phallic stage, is no longer sufficient to cope with the conflict between sexual urges and the moral code of the superego, so the individual must begin finding new ways of coping.

Persons who deal successfully with the reawakened sexual conflict have particular recourse to the defence mechanisms of *displacement* and *sublimation*. In this way they find a means of satisfying sexual and other urges without having to experience acutely severe guilt feelings. Pre-genital sexual urges (that is, oral, anal and phallic drives) experienced during this stage are at least partially satisfied through heterosexual relationships (especially through actions such as kissing and caressing, which play an important role in sexual foreplay), and also by using substitutive sexual actions and objects. According to Freud, a man falls in love with a woman who reminds him of his mother and in this sense his wife is a substitute for his mother.

A woman, however, chooses a man who is a substitute for her father. She would like to have a child (especially a son) who is a symbolic substitute for the penis she lacks.

Prohibited aggressive urges are at least partially satisfied through activities such as work and sport. As Freud expressed it once, a healthy adult is capable of loving and working (Freud, 1963a, Vol.15). This means that mature people can satisfy a good proportion of their prohibited urges in a sublimated, acceptable way and therefore experience relatively few guilt feelings. However, nobody is so healthy as to satisfy all his or her urges without any conflict at all.

When the child at any stage experiences grave problems with canalising the sexual energy, he or she might use regression as a defence mechanism to cope with the anxiety associated with the prevailing stage of development. They will take on behaviour patterns of a previous stage where they felt safe. For example, a teenager who experiences problems with the reawakened sex drive may regress to an earlier stage by resuming thumb-sucking or the sucking of a pen in order to cope with the repressed sexual energy and to remove from consciousness the anxiety caused by the repressed sexual energy.

Self-evaluation questions

- Why is Freud's developmental theory known as a psychosexual theory? Explain the role allocated to sexual energy in Freud's theory.
- Explain the important role of various defence mechanisms in the development of a person during the various developmental stages.
- Explain how identification differs from normal imitation, and discuss the role of identification in human development according to Freud.
- What would you regard as the most important developmental stage according to Freud? Give reasons for your answer.

3.7 Optimal development

What does Freud regard as ideal functioning?

Freud does not provide a lot of detail on optimal development, presumably because he is primarily interested in the explanation and treatment of psychic disturbances, and because for him there is no essential difference between healthy and psychologically disturbed people. Both groups, as he sees it, are grappling with the same psychic problems; namely the handling of continual conflict between drives and morals. The difference between the two is simply one of degree – the healthy are better at conflict resolution than the disturbed. Although Freud believes that a completely conflict-free existence is not possible, it is clear that what he called the *genital character* is the personality type that comes closest to representing the ideal of balanced conflict management. This type of personality can be described from developmental, structural and dynamic perspectives.

- **Developmental viewpoint:** Looked at from the perspective of Freud's developmental theory, the genital character is characterised by the fact that the genital stage of development is attained without any fixations on pre-genital stages (Maddi, 1980). There is thus no regression to pre-genital stages of development.
- **Structural viewpoint:** From a structural point of view, this ideal personality type has a strong ego and a superego that is not overly strict. These characteristics are what determine how the genital character functions.
- **Dynamic viewpoint:** Although the basic psychodynamic is the same as with all other individuals in the sense that the same sexual and aggressive drives come into conflict with moral rules, the genital character type's ego is capable of effective reality testing. These types of people use the most effective defence mechanism; namely sublimation. This implies that such persons are able to satisfy their sexual and aggressive urges in socially acceptable and appreciated ways which, in turn, implies that they will have a satisfactory sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex and will find fulfilment in their work. Freud once summarised these attributes as 'the ability to love and to work'.

Freud's view of optimal development thus points to a well-adjusted person who manages his or her life according to the overt moral prescriptions of the society of his Victorian time.

Self-evaluation question

- How does Freud envisage an optimally functioning person?

Activity

Looking at yourself and people you know fairly well, apply Freud's view to determine which defence mechanisms (of those you are conscious of), you and they apply. Do you and they meet Freud's criteria for an optimally functioning person?

3.8 Views on psychopathology

How does Freud view pathological behaviour?

Freud regards his **psychoanalytical theory** as an explanation for both normal and abnormal behaviour; therefore, he views abnormal behaviour as merely an extreme and exaggerated form of normal behaviour.

Psychological disorders, according to Freud, are caused by an imbalance in the structure of the personality. Basically this means that the ego is too weak to handle conflict between the id and the superego effectively. Such an inability on the part of the ego has both historical and contemporary causes.

KEY TERM

psychoanalytical theory: the term refers, strictly speaking, to Freud's theory, which he developed as a result of analysing human functioning (analysis of the psyche) based on his psychotherapeutic method known as psychoanalysis

The historical causes: These causes can be traced back to the psychosexual development of the person in the pre-genital stages, specifically in one or more of the following:

- *Fixation in a stage:* This fixation causes unsolved problems to be repressed to the unconscious and allows excessive, fear-arousing drive energy to remain present in the psyche (Rychlak, 1981).
- *The development of too weak an ego:* This means that the ego has not developed sufficient rational skills for drive satisfaction or that it uses ineffective defence mechanisms. It can also be caused by fixation and parental over-protection.
- *The development of an overly strict superego:* Such a superego can develop when parental discipline is too strict (the child takes over the strict rules through identification), or when the opportunity for the expression of aggression is too limited (the child's excess aggressive energy is then used by the superego against the child itself). (See 'The phallic stage'.)

The contemporary contributory causes: These causes may stem from any changes or crises that upset the person's balance between the fulfilment of drives and guilt feelings. These changes or crises are usually brought about by the transition from one stage to another or by a radical change in the person's lifestyle.

When the ego can no longer cope with the anxiety that results from the conflict between the id and the superego by means of the usual defence mechanisms, it resorts to pathological ways of handling conflicts. Freud regards pathology as a desperate effort to escape from this conflict situation (Freud, 1953c, Vol.7).

Although Freud distinguishes three types of mental disorder; namely *neuroses*, *personality disorders* and *psychoses*, his main focus, however, was on the treatment of neuroses. His theory, to a large extent, developed in order to explain this kind of behaviour, with the result that he pays almost no attention to the other types of mental disorders.

What are neuroses, personality disorders and psychoses, according to Freud?

The types of mental disorder that Freud calls neuroses coincide, to a large degree, with what the modern *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)* (2013) calls 'anxiety disorders' (Butcher, Hooley & Mineka, 2014).

Neuroses, according to Freud, develop because of the ego's inability to cope with the conflict between the id and the superego. As a result, the ego produces a symptom in a desperate effort to save the situation. The direct cause of this condition is often a specific incident that brings an underlying conflict to the surface.

Example

Freud's patient, Dora, developed an irritating throat infection as a symptom of an unconscious oral sexual wish connected with her father – the indirect cause of the symptom. The contemporary direct cause of Dora's situation, however, was that her father had a cold and a cough (Freud, 1953c, Vol.7).

A symptom is a particularly interesting phenomenon that performs various functions simultaneously, according to Freud.

- It is a form of communication of which the neurotic is not aware. For example, Dora's sore throat tells the psychoanalyst (and perhaps the father) that the suppressed wish is an oral sexual drive.
- The symptom is also punishment. The fact that Dora's throat is sore means that her superego regards the wish as abhorrent and therefore punishes her for it.
- The symptom is a symbolic satisfaction of an unconscious wish. Dora's throat is examined and treated by a doctor (who is an authority figure and is therefore a symbol for her father) and she has to swallow medicine (which could be an oral sexual act in her fantasy).
- The symptom provides the patient with what Freud terms *secondary advantages*, such as attention and sympathy, or sometimes even to punish another person. Dora receives quite a lot of attention, especially from her father; she need not work; her father, who does not satisfy her unconscious wish, is punished through his worry about his daughter. Secondary advantages can severely hamper the treatment of neuroses (Freud, 1953c, Vol.7).

Neuroses may be described as an attempt on the part of unconscious urges to deceive the ego and in this respect they are similar to manifest dream content and parapraxes.

Personality disorders are, according to Freud, deeply-rooted disturbed ways of dealing with conflict and the satisfaction of drives. The personality disturbance is the result of fixation and the consequent regression to the appropriate pre-genital development stage.

Psychoses are, for Freud, the result of a complete inability to deal with anxiety on the part of the ego, resulting in a total withdrawal and distortion of reality. The ego disintegrated to such an extent that it could not function according to the reality principle any more.

Self-evaluation question

- Describe the functioning of a neurotic personality, according to Freud.

3.9 Implications and applications

What are the implications of Freud's theory for everyday living?

Freud's influence on psychological thought, on applied psychology and on the everyday lives of people in the modern world is, without doubt, greater than the influence of any other psychologist in Western civilisation. When discussing the implications of his theory, one should bear in mind that Freud developed his theory in cultural circumstances that are worlds apart from today's circumstances.

Although Freud himself believed that his theory could be applied to all people because it mirrors the basic nature of the human being, this position is extremely vulnerable to criticism. Given modern time's permissive moral standards in relation to sexual matters, a more relaxed approach to toilet-training, and the fact that cultural differences exist regarding some issues addressed in Freud's theory, it is highly questionable how applicable Freud's theory might be to present-day South Africa.

It is, all the same, useful to give attention to certain points, partly because this makes it easier to understand Freud's theory and partly because his thinking does yield wisdom that is still both valid and applicable today.

What are the implications of Freud's theory for education, developmental psychology, psychotherapy, research, psychological measurement and aggression?

3.9.1 Education and developmental psychology

Freud's theory has broad implications, especially for the education of pre-school children. Many of the child-rearing principles applied by twenty-first century parents are the direct or indirect result of Freud's thinking. Freud's position that the personality is almost completely formed by the age of six, and the emphasis that he places on the handling of the child's psychosexual problems by the parents, imply clearly that parents' behaviour during the first six years of their child's life will greatly determine whether the child will be a normal or a psychologically disordered person. Freud's theory implies, for example, that education should be geared to the development of a strong ego, but that an over-strict superego is not desirable. However, the precise educational methods as to how this could be accomplished are not spelled out by his theory.

Freud's views inspired post-Freudians such as Anna Freud, Melanie Klein and Erik Erikson to develop their own developmental theories within the psychoanalytical paradigm, concentrating on child development; the work of these psychologists eventually gave rise to **Developmental Psychology** as a separate discipline within psychology. Freud's focus on child development initially influenced research in developmental psychology to such an extent that for decades, research mainly concentrated on the development of the child, neglecting adulthood and adult development (Gerdes, Ochse, Stander & van Ede, 1981:5; Gerdes, 1988).

3.9.2 Psychotherapy

Psychoanalytic therapy was, for a considerable period, the predominating psychotherapeutic technique, and is still used in Western countries today. There are still many orthodox psychoanalysts who apply Freud's techniques, faithful to their master's example. Psychoanalytic therapy is, however, a protracted and expensive process and is therefore used chiefly in affluent communities.

Nonetheless, a large number of psychotherapists and other health workers have a Freudian orientation (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981:60). Many psychologists, social workers and educators avail themselves of Freudian methods and interpretations, often in a relatively informal way and in combination with other approaches. In their complete, orthodox form, Freud's therapeutic techniques are extremely complex and can be used only by highly trained therapists.

The purpose of psychoanalytic therapy is to discover the causes of the patient's problems and to enable the patient to overcome the problems through more constructive ways of dealing with the underlying conflicts. Freud once described psychotherapy as follows: 'Where id was, there shall ego be. It is a reclamation work, like the draining of the Zuyder Zee' (Freud, 1964a:111–112). This quotation is often misinterpreted as meaning that it is sufficient if the repressed urges of the patient are simply made conscious. It should be noted, however, that the ego, which must replace the dominance of the id, is characterised by its efforts to serve three masters (the id, the superego and external reality) simultaneously by bringing about a balance in their demands. The process of therapy is therefore not only a matter of making unconscious drives conscious, but also of making conscious the conflict between drives, moral demands and the demands of society, as well as bringing about a better balance between the structural parts of the personality. Therapy aims, firstly, at helping the patient re-experience the repressed wishes and memories so that the dammed-up energy can be utilised. Secondly, in the longer term, however, it aims to teach the patient to experience as much drive satisfaction and as little guilt as possible in the future, or in other words to help the patient to approach the ideal of optimal development (Maddi, 1980:42).

KEY TERM

psychoanalysis: literally, a method of analysing the contents of the psyche by means of techniques such as free association and dream analysis in order to determine which unconscious conflicts and memories are causing a patient's problems

Various aspects of a Freudian *therapeutic process* can be distinguished:

Freud created a situation in which the patient could relax and concentrate on his or her subjective experience, in order to bring the repressed unconscious

causes of the problems back to consciousness. The patient reclined on a couch and Freud sat at an angle behind the patient, encouraging the patient to tell him everything that came to mind and emerged from the unconscious. This procedure, called *free association*, is the most basic technique of **psychoanalysis**. The aim is to evade the patient's defences through free association, which then automatically leads to the deeper parts of the unconscious where the root of the problem lies.



Sigmund Freud in his study
Source: Public domain: 9d2970d

In his interpretations, Freud used a number of specialised techniques and guidelines that continue to play an important role in psychoanalytic therapy. One of these, dream analysis, has already been discussed. Another was his identification of patients' resistance to becoming aware of unconscious elements.

This resistance manifests itself in different ways, for example:

- when the patient suddenly changes the topic
- when the patient indicates that his or her free associations are interrupted because he or she cannot remember
- when the patient is late or cancels an appointment.

Freud regarded resistance as an indication that the unconscious cause of the problem was nearing the conscious level and the patient was trying to avoid the accompanying anxiety. It follows that resistance is a positive signal to the therapist that he or she is on the right track.

KEY TERM

transference: a form of displacement that emerges when the patient displays attraction or aggression towards the therapist

The most interesting guideline the psychoanalyst uses is probably the phenomenon that Freud calls **transference**. (Freud, 1953c, Vol.7; Freud, 1958, Vol.12; Freud, 1955c, Vol.18). Transference is a form of displacement that emerges when the patient displays attraction or aggression towards the therapist, for example when the patient falls in love with the therapist. As the therapist deliberately demonstrates a neutral attitude, the patient's behaviour is not elicited by the therapist's behaviour. Freud interprets these feelings as originating from the patient's childhood, and thinks that the therapist is merely a substitute object. Freud sees the nature of the patient's behaviour and the feelings expressed towards the therapist as a good indicator of the nature of the feelings and memories that form the essence of the problem.

The cognitive insights that the patient gains from his or her associations and especially from the therapist's interpretations, are not enough for therapeutic success. For the therapy to be successful, it is necessary for the patient to work through the repressed memories and to acquire more efficient means of coping with conflict. Freud maintains that merely recalling past life events is not enough. To achieve success, these memories have to be relived in the therapeutic situation. Freud contends that transference is an ideal opportunity for re-experiencing past events and that it assists the patient in acquiring new and more efficient behaviour. Transference, therefore, can be regarded as one of the core processes of psychoanalytic therapy.

When the patient transfers his or her repressed feelings from his or her childhood to the therapist, the patient relives the cause of his or her neurosis on a reduced scale. Freud calls this a *transference neurosis*. The duty of the therapist is to explain these transferred feelings of love or aggression to the patient and not to react to them. At the same time, the transference neurosis creates an opportunity for taking the final step in the therapeutic process, namely the acquisition of more effective ways of behaving. The patient displays his or her ineffective behaviour in his or her reaction to the therapist and this gives the therapist the opportunity to explain more effective forms of behaviour for coping with the ever-present conflict between drives and moral rules.

It must be mentioned, in conclusion, that psychoanalytic therapy is a demanding and prolonged process. Often the patient is expected to undergo therapy five times per week, each session lasting about an hour. Sometimes the whole therapy may continue for several years. Also, the therapy does not guarantee a final solution to the problem, nor does it promise that the underlying conflict will be eliminated. The more immediate goal of therapy is to help patients develop more effective ways of coping with their problems. A person's basic problem – the conflict between the id drives and the moral demands of society – is not ultimately solved by psychotherapy.

Self-evaluation question

- Describe the procedures and techniques involved in Freud's therapeutic process and make sure that you understand his concepts of free association, resistance, transference and transference neurosis.

3.9.3 Measurement and research

Freud's theory yielded few new methods and, accordingly, it did not lead to important new developments in the area of psychological research and measurement techniques. His theory does, however, have implications concerning the nature of the information researchers need to assemble, and consequently it has had a considerable influence on psychological research by focusing researchers' interest on certain research topics.

Freud's (1985, Vol. 12) therapeutic method contributed to the development of the *case study method* (the intensive study of the individual), which as a research method became particularly useful in clinical psychology. Freud himself actually used the case study as his sole method of research (Liebert & Spiegler, 1996). It should, however, be borne in mind that Freud's case studies were not confined to a detailed description of a patient's behaviour, but that they mainly concentrated on the interpretation of a patient's behaviour. Freud interpreted a wide spectrum of his patients' behaviour, such as how they behaved during therapy, their accounts of their own behaviour, memories, dreams, performance errors and free associations, all with the purpose of finding out what was going on in the unconscious. Apart from certain limitations of the case study method (i.e., that it relies on subjective observation and data collection; that it cannot be replicated, and clinical observations cannot always be verified), the way in which Freud applied the case history was also criticised (i.e., that he did not keep verbatim notes of the therapy sessions, but only made notes hours after he has seen a patient; that he hardly ever verified the accuracy of a patient's stories). Apart from these limitations and criticisms, Freud's theory and research stimulated further research which contributed a wealth of material about the human personality (Schultz & Schultz, 2005:71–73).

The research initiated by Freud's theory may be illustrated by the large number of projects undertaken with the purpose of testing the so-called *catharsis hypothesis*.

This hypothesis, which is based on Freud's drive theory, and more specifically on his *thanatos* concept, states that the tendency towards aggressive behaviour will diminish when people have the opportunity to express their aggression in a harmless way, thereby reducing the energy of the death drive. Feshbach (1961) tested this hypothesis, finding initial confirmation for the catharsis hypothesis. Further reflection and research, however, caused more and more objections to emerge. It was pointed out, for example, that verbal aggression was not an effective means of decreasing the aggressive drive in Freud's sense. Further research carried out over the years by various researchers has mostly failed to confirm the catharsis hypothesis (Bushman, Baumeister & Stack, 1999; Bushman, 2002; Parlamis, Allred & Block, 2010). Contrary to the hypothesis, it was also found that catharsis might even increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviour (Lohr, Olatunji, Baumeister & Bushman, 2007) and that many people engage in aggressive behaviour to regulate (improve) their emotional and affective states (Bushman, Baumeister & Phillips, 2001). After reviewing the pertinent research on the role of catharsis in psychotherapy, Lewis and Bucher (1992), come to the conclusion that catharsis should be abandoned as a therapeutic tool, and that other techniques should rather be applied to alleviate aggression. Consequently, the hypothesis is no longer regarded in modern psychology as a sufficient explanation for aggression and violence (Baron, 1977; Berkowitz, 1993; Campbell & Gibbs, 1986; Hertzberg, Ostrum & Field, 1990; Meyer, 1982; Siann, 1985; Zillman, 1978).

Schultz & Schultz (2005:73–83) give a comprehensive review of research areas stimulated by the theories of Freud, such as subliminal perception, ego functioning, defence mechanisms, Oedipus complex, and personality types and development.

In the field of psychological measurement, Freud's theory gave some impetus to the development of *projective techniques*. One of the first techniques, and still one of the most frequently used, is the Rorschach test, which was developed by Hermann Rorschach (1884–1922) in 1911. The Rorschach test consists of a number of interesting and vaguely shaped inkblots. The subject is asked to look at each inkblot and then to say what they think it represents. In fact, the subjects see human faces and animals, just as one sometimes does when looking at clouds. The hypothesis is that the psychologist can reach conclusions about the subjects' personalities and more specifically about their unconscious drives and tendencies, by paying close attention to the subjects' 'projected responses'. Note is taken of the nature of the projected perceptions (for example, is it a human, animal or an object response?), and which aspects of the inkblots are used to determine the perceptions (such as form, colour, the blot as a whole or detail of the blot).

Although projective techniques are regarded as suspect in modern psychology, they are still used by a large number of psychologists, especially in the practice of clinical psychology (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997).

Enrichment

Projective techniques

Projective techniques are psychological techniques whereby subjects are exposed to relatively unstructured stimuli. The assumption is that the individuals will reveal their unconscious propensities and wishes when they interpret the stimuli. This process is regarded as being similar to the defence mechanism of projection: people see something that is actually inside themselves as if it were 'out there'.

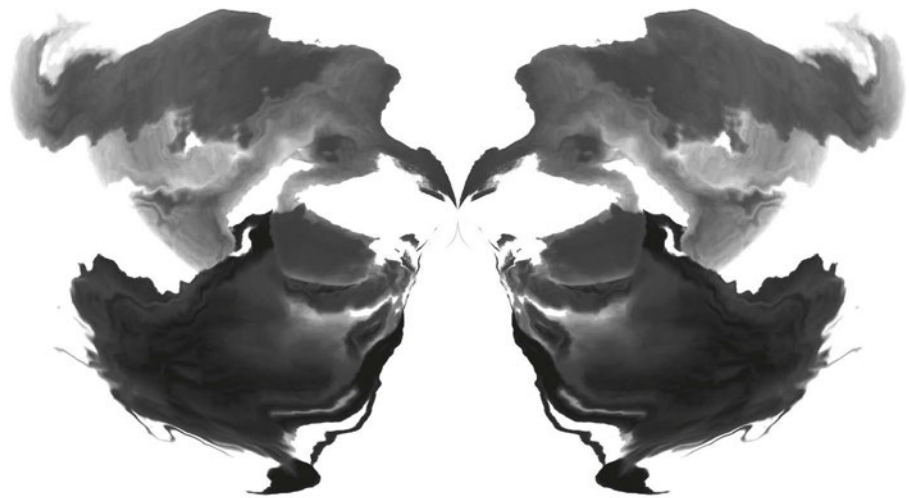


Figure 3.2 An example of a stimulus that is similar to those used in the Rorschach test. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rorschach_blot_05.jpg)

Source: Fotolia: 36727352

The following webpage gives a useful introduction to the Rorschach test as a projective technique, and provides information about its history, method, scoring, interpretation and applicability: (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rorschach_test)

3.9.4 The interpretation and handling of aggression

The implications of Freud's theory in this area are quite clear. Freud contends that aggression is the result of the inherent death drive that is diverted to the outside in the form of aggression and violence, and there is not much we can do to reduce violence. Freud himself actually says, 'There is no use trying to get rid of man's aggressive inclination' (cited in Pervin, 1978:70).

If, at a particular juncture, violence was to increase, especially if it did so in certain geographical areas and among certain groups, Freud would probably have tried to offer explanations such as the following:

- There had been a relaxation of the moral code in these areas and among social groups concerned.
- Individuals and groups in this area could have high levels of aggressive drive energy.
- Violence is essentially derived from the death drive and repressed death wishes.

With regard to the management of violence, Freud would probably have looked for a solution from two directions:

- Firstly, in the context of the catharsis hypothesis, he would have considered opportunities for the discharge and sublimation of aggressive energy. This should ideally be done at both a socially acceptable and culturally valuable level, so that aggression could be sublimated to society's advantage.
- Secondly, he would probably have recommended the strengthening of moral prescriptions against violence, but it would be difficult to lay down precise, effective steps whereby this could be achieved.

In conclusion, we should point out that the validity of any interpretation of aggression, as well as the effectiveness of the coping measures based on it, depend on how correct the underlying theory is. The objections to Freud's theory that are set out in the following section should therefore be borne in mind.

3.10 Evaluation of the theory

Freud's theory is so comprehensive and it has had such a wide influence on twentieth century thinking, that it is impossible to present a comprehensive discussion and evaluation of it within the confines of a few pages. Before evaluating Freud's theory, one must always keep Madison's (1956:75) observation of Freud's work in mind, that his writings,

'... represent an historical account of an adventurous explorer developing a system of concepts that changed and grew continuously and unevenly over a half-century of creative efforts ... [subsequently he] left behind a trail of complex ideas unevenly developed and never integrated into a logical, systematic whole.'

Only a few remarks can be made, with the full realisation that more comments would be appropriate.

A matter which should be considered in evaluating Freud's theory is its widespread influence inside and outside the domain of psychology. His theory plays an important role in the training of psychologists and psychiatrists throughout the world (Bootzin & Acocella, 1980; Hall, Lindzey, Loehlin & Manosevitz, 1985; Rychlak, 1981), and in intellectual activities such as the study of literature, religion and anthropology and the interpretation of works of art. Freudian concepts are used in other areas, such as in theology (for example, in studying the idea of God and religious experience), in anthropology (for example, in explaining cultural phenomena such as rituals and taboos), and in the study of literary theory (for example, in the study of writers and in the analysis of their works). More than any other theory, Freud's conceptual framework has become part of Western culture. Clearly, psychoanalysis undoubtedly occupies a significant position in psychology as well as in the modern person's general academic armoury. Paul Gray (1993:49) refers to Freud's thinking as 'this ... century's dominant model for thinking and talking about human behavior' and points out that a large number of Freudian concepts, metaphors and expressions, such as penis envy, castration anxiety, phallic symbols, the id, ego and superego, repressed memories and sexual sublimation, have become part of everyday language in many parts of the world.

Nonetheless, it must be noted that the position of psychoanalysis in modern psychology is a somewhat controversial one. On the one hand there are, certainly, active psychoanalysis associations throughout the world, as well as a variety of journals devoted to psychoanalysis and its growth (for example, the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* and *Revue Française de Psychoanalyse*). Furthermore, dozens of books are still written about Freud and psychoanalysis every year.

On the other hand, however, Freud's theory is severely criticised and even entirely rejected, particularly by psychologists who are interested mainly in empirical research, but also by those who emphasise the interaction between person and situation and the ecosystemic context. The psychological literature has many examples of criticism against Freud's theory. Here we can mention only a few.

- Freud's theory is often labelled *biological determinism*, meaning that the behaviour and development of individuals are determined by biological factors. In fact, there are many aspects of his theory which support such an interpretation, for example, in developmental stages to specific aspects of biological maturation processes. Yet it must be pointed out that he does not consistently maintain a biologically deterministic view. His description of the phallic stage definitely does not follow a biologically deterministic line. Although the boy's sexual urge is associated with his sexual organ, fantasy involving his mother plays a much more important role than fondling his penis. For a girl, the connection between her psychic urge and biology is even more tenuous as her sexual fantasies, according to Freud, take place precisely because of the absence of a male sex organ.

Freud's works themselves, especially his case studies, reveal that he usually analyses a patient's feelings, memories and fantasies and seldom refers to real physical satisfaction of the sexual drives, or its absence. This leads us to the conclusion that Freud attaches much more value to psychological than to biological explanations of behaviour. One could also surmise that his references to the physical energy sources of drives are the result of his efforts to comply with the requirements of the model of science at that time, and therefore not necessarily the outcome of his own convictions. It seems, therefore, that Freud is not a strict biological determinist, but that he holds, rather, the viewpoint of *psychic determinism*.

- One of the most important criticisms is that most of his concepts are so widely and vaguely defined that it is impossible to subject his theory to rigorous scientific testing (Liebert & Spiegler, 1996). In his description of a structural concept such as the id, for example, one never knows whether Freud actually saw the id as a childlike part of the personality or whether his description is intended metaphorically. The problem of vagueness is compounded by the fact that his theory has several concepts that enable the psychoanalyst to interpret the same form of behaviour in different ways.

For example, when a mother displays a lot of love for her child, this can be explained as real love or as reaction formation against underlying hatred. Freud does not provide any precise criteria whereby a person can decide when behaviour should be accepted at face value and when it should be interpreted as the opposite. This vagueness and ambiguity make it impossible to find empirical proof either for or against the theory as any findings can be interpreted in different ways.

- Psychoanalytic theory is a conceptual framework that makes it possible to explain past behaviour but it does not provide for accurate predictions of behaviour. Furthermore, Freud's concepts are vague and lack precise criteria for the interpretation of behaviour. For *ex post facto* explanations vagueness is an advantage, which is perhaps a reason for the popularity of Freud's theory. From a scientific viewpoint, however, vagueness is not acceptable because the conceptual framework can never properly be evaluated and cannot be improved upon. By means of concepts such as the unconscious, reaction formation, rationalisation and other defence mechanisms, it is possible to interpret almost all behaviour as the result of sexual and/or aggressive drives. We do not argue against Freud's idea that people use these mechanisms, nor do we disagree with his contention that human behaviour is complex and that the reasons for people's behaviour are often concealed. We also do not oppose the contention that a single form of behaviour can have different meanings. What we are trying to indicate is that his theory is vague and that more precise criteria for the interpretation of behaviour should be spelt out so that more objective decisions can be taken than those based on the psychoanalyst's subjective opinion.

Finally, we might ask how relevant Freud's theory is in the modern South African context, and whether it is still important to study it. As we have already mentioned, the theory originated in the cultural climate prevailing in Europe in about 1890 to 1930, and it reflects the scientific views of that time, as well as the moral standards of (in particular) its middle and upper classes. Obviously the cultural values and norms of modern South Africa are quite different, specifically in regard to sexual activities and scientific standards. All the same, there are good reasons for regarding the study of Freud's theory as useful and important:

- The first is that some aspects of Freud's theory do appear to have a degree of validity, setting aside the emphasis on specific drives and cultural norms related to these. It seems that Freud's explanation of how people function is a useful conceptual medium for understanding human behaviour, even in a cultural context that is vastly different from that of the Victorian era, for example, the defence mechanisms, which are apparently used in any situation of conflict between the individual's needs and social norms and are not tied solely to the sexual and aggressive drives.
- A second reason is that Freud's theory needs to be seen in the context of psychoanalytical thinking, which as a school of thought has contributed greatly to our understanding of human behaviour and modern psychology

(Westen, 1998). A knowledge of Freud's terminology and ideas (i.e., unconscious processes, mental representations of the self and developmental stages of personality) is vital for access to and comprehension of this broad approach and, in addition, it provides access to the world's psychological literature and the literature of other social sciences.

Self-evaluation questions

- Explain why Freud's theory is sometime described as biological determinism and sometimes as psychic determinism. Which one of the two interpretations do you regard as the more valid one, and why?
- Do you think Freud's theory has any validity in the modern context? If so, motivate your answer.

3.11 Suggested reading

Badcock, C (1988). *Essential Freud: A modern introduction to classical psychoanalysis*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Freud, S (1953a). *The interpretation of dreams*. (Standard Edition) Vols. 4–5, London: Hogarth Press.

Freud, S (1953c). *A case of hysteria, Three essays on sexuality and other works*. (Standard Edition) Vol. 7, London: Hogarth Press.

Freud, S (1963a & b). *Introductory lectures on psychoanalysis*. (Standard Edition) Vol. 15–16, London: Hogarth Press.

Freud, S (1964a). *New introductory lectures on psychoanalysis*. (Standard Edition) Vol. 22, London: Hogarth Press.

Gay, P (2006). *Freud: A life for Our Time*. New York: WW Norton.

Jones, E (1953–1957). *The life and work of Sigmund Freud (Vols. 1–3)*. New York: Basic Books.

Roazen, P (1975). *Freud and his followers*. New York: Knopf.

Thomson, G (2008) *Sigmund Freud*. *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*. (www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Sigmund_Freud.aspx)



Chapter 4

The analytical theory of Carl Jung (1875–1961)

Henning Viljoen

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4.1 Outcomes

- Understand the **dialectic–holistic nature** of Jung’s theory and how his views differ from those of Freud.
- Understand Jung’s view of the **psyche** as a dynamically structured totality or whole: not an indivisible whole, but rather a divisible or divided entity which continuously strives towards ‘wholeness’ of the **self**.
- Grasp the important role Jung ascribes to the **collective unconsciousness** and the different **archetypes**.
- Understand how he regards the human being as a complex energy system which functions according to two principles – **the principle of equality and the principle of entropy** – derived from thermodynamics.
- Clearly distinguish between Jung’s view of **optimal functioning** and **pathological functioning**.
- Apply Jung’s **typology** in daily contact with people and become acquainted with the techniques Jung devised to gather information about human functioning, namely the **word-association test**, **dream analysis** and **active imagination**.
- Indicate the **relevance** of Jung’s theory for present-day human functioning.

4.2 Background

Jung’s analytical theory is universally regarded as highly complex. It incorporates and develops some basic Freudian principles because both Freud and Jung were influenced by the scientific and philosophical developments of the nineteenth century, including the evolutionary theory and certain discoveries in archaeology and cross-cultural studies.



Carl Gustav Jung
Source: Public domain:
C G Jung

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), the son of a Swiss Reformed Church pastor, was born in the small Swiss town of Kesswyl on Lake Constance. The theoretical views he developed in adulthood were greatly influenced by the religious atmosphere in which he grew up and which generally played an important role in his life. Although Jung was not a regular churchgoer, he was a believer who gave the religious dimension of the human psyche an important role in his theory. As a youth he wanted to be an archaeologist, but a dream persuaded him that he should follow in his grandfather’s footsteps and become a medical doctor. In 1900 he qualified from the University of Basel and started work as an intern at the Burgholzli Psychiatric Hospital in Zurich. There he encountered such prominent psychiatrists as Eugene Bleuler and Pierre Janet. He was also introduced to Freud’s psychoanalytical approach during this period.

What was Freud’s influence on Jung’s theoretical thinking?

Jung became interested in Freud’s work after reading his book on the interpretation of dreams. He began to apply some of Freud’s ideas in his own practice, and in 1906 he seized the bull by the horns and wrote to Freud. This initial contact led

to a weekly exchange of letters and a number of visits between these two great patriarchs of psychology. The correspondence and friendship between them lasted six years. Freud initially regarded Jung as his crown prince and successor, but as a result of their irreconcilable theoretical views and, to a certain extent, a clash of personalities, Freud terminated their friendship and professional co-operation in 1913 in a last letter to Jung. In this letter he stated quite clearly that he would prefer them to sever their personal relationship entirely. This estrangement was a severe blow to Jung and caused the period known as his ‘dark years’. For about three years he read no scientific works, embarking on a process of self-exploration and through the ‘analysis of his own psyche discovered himself’.

Enrichment

When Jung embarked on his self-exploration, which he called his ‘confrontation with the unconscious’, the core of it became reflected in *The Red Book*. In this large and illuminated volume, which he created between 1914 and 1934, he developed the major principles of his theory – the archetypes, collective unconscious and process of individuation. Jung considered *The Red Book* to be his most important work, although it was never published during his lifetime and only became accessible when it was published in 2009. In 2012 a ‘Reader’s Edition’ was published, omitting the facsimile reproduction of Jung’s original calligraphic manuscript, but retaining the complete translated text along with the introductory notes prepared by Sonu Shamdasani who also acted as editor and translator of the original manuscript.

Jung could not accept Freud’s mechanistic view of a person, which regarded the individual as the product of a ‘suppressed sexual past’. He accepted that behaviour was the consequence of past events but maintained that it was also directed towards the future. Jung’s theory incorporates the *deterministic past* but also stresses a *teleological perspective* towards the future and is therefore less pessimistic than Freud’s, which would have people helplessly driven by their instincts and their pasts. According to Freud, people are perpetually trapped in a conflict between their instinctual drives and the demands of society. Jung, in contrast, sees people as orientated towards a perpetual creative development in striving to achieve a complete self. For Jung this is the effect of a religious drive in the human being.

Below is a link to a YouTube video, *Face to Face with Carl Jung, part 1–4*, in which John Freeman talks to Jung about his childhood, relationship with his parents, choice of career, encounters and differences with Freud, his discovery of the collective unconscious, psychological types, dreams and his view of religion and death.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLJsiQ4h3fY

Jung also rejected Freud’s theory of libido, with its exaggerated emphasis on sexuality. He felt that Freud did not give enough attention to a person’s *religious dimension*. Freud, in turn, could not accept Jung’s concept of the *collective unconscious*, though he did accept the notion of a ‘racial memory’. Jung’s interest in precognition, parapsychology and occult phenomena was also unacceptable to Freud.

There were also minor theoretical differences between Jung and Freud, such as their views on the dynamics underlying the *Oedipus complex* (see Chapter 3). Jung saw it as the result of the interaction between psychic and religious needs in the mother–father–child relationship rather than an expression of sexual desires.

On a more personal level, Jung rebelled against Freud's paternalistic attitude towards him. Freud did not want to make room for Jung's original and independent thinking within the conceptual framework of Freudian orthodoxy. Jung's theory is typified as analytical because he goes much more deeply into the unconscious in analysing the psyche than Freud does. In his analysis of the human psyche, Jung reveals its many composite elements and emphasises its complexity.

Self-evaluation question

- The friendship between Freud and Jung ended in a bitter clash. Discuss the main points of difference between Freud and Jung.

4.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

Why can Jung's basic view of the person be described as dialectical and holistic?

Jung's view of the person and the psyche is so complex that it appears to be at once both optimistic and pessimistic, both deterministic and teleological. To Jung, human beings are complex, dynamic organisms made up of opposing factors that may *drive* or *draw* them into action, either consciously or unconsciously. In view of these opposing forces that Jung distinguished in the human psyche, we may regard his view of the person as dialectical. Like philosophers such as Hegel and Schelling, Jung ascribes the development of the psyche or consciousness to a **dialectical** relationship between opposing forces. These opposing forces propel the psyche from a simple, undifferentiated, unconscious natural state to a complex state of higher psychic awareness and spiritual fulfilment. Clarke (1992:65) explains that Jung regards the psyche:

... not as some static substance, but rather as a continually evolving process which arises from unconscious roots in nature, and, while retaining all the marks of its origins in unconscious nature, is nevertheless engaged in a struggle to rise to a higher state of fulfilment and self-expression ... this struggle is essentially dialectical in nature, that is to say it depends on the creative conflict between opposite tendencies which through their very oppositions provide the energy whereby the psyche is sublimated in a higher state.

Jung believed that these opposing forces are present in all people. Consequently, nobody can be all good or all evil, purely introverted or extraverted, masculine or feminine, since the unconscious is dominated by the opposite of what dominates at a conscious level. Human beings strive towards integrating these opposite tendencies into a harmonious whole, the *self*.

Like Freud, Jung regards conflict as an inherent part of being human. However, Samuels (1985:8) points out that there is a crucial difference between Freud's and Jung's views of conflict. For Freud, unresolved and unregenerate conflict is the wellspring of neurosis whilst Jung regarded the coming together of apparently

irreconcilable psychic contents as the basis of healthy development, providing a new position from which the individual can proceed.

Self-evaluation question

- The theories of Freud and Jung both emphasise the role of conflict between two opposing forces in human functioning. How does Jung's view of this conflict actually differ from Freud's view?

KEY TERM

dialectic–holistic

approach: 'dialectic' refers to Jung's view that the psyche develops due to opposing forces that propel the psyche to develop from an undifferentiated, unconscious, natural state to a complex state of higher psychic awareness and spiritual fulfilment; 'holistic' refers to Jung's view that the ultimate goal of development is to attain 'wholeness' as represented in the attainment of the self

Jung's theory may be regarded as **holistic** because he does not only concentrate on the structures, processes and content of the individual psyche, but he also places the psyche in a broad, inherited collective context (which he calls the *collective unconscious*). Jung's holistic approach is also reflected in his view that the ultimate goal in the development of personality is to attain 'wholeness', as represented by the attainment of a self. According to Smith (1990:2): 'Jung's work can best be described as the quest for human "wholeness".'

Which dimensions in human functioning are recognised by Jung?

Jung describes the following dimensions of being human:

- The **physiological dimension** involves all processes and drives that are essential for physical survival, including the need to breathe, eat, drink and have sex. Jung was opposed to the reductionist explanation of psychic processes in terms of physiological processes because he believed that this led to a 'psychology without the psyche'. Instead he strove to develop a 'psychology with a psyche'. Jung did not deny the importance of biological factors in human existence; he merely believed that psychic processes should be studied in their own right, in terms of their own intrinsic regularities, rather than to be traced back to a physiological origin and acknowledged only in a physiological context (Jung, 1958a:46; 1960:344).
- The **social dimension** is concerned with interaction with other people.
- The **psychic dimension** refers to all those conscious processes, which can logically be understood and explained by reason and which help a person adapt to his or her reality.
- The **spiritual or religious dimension** refers to people's dependence on and subjection to irrational experiences; that is, experiences that cannot be understood and explained by human reason. The human being, for Jung, is both a rational and an irrational being and it is especially the latter which, he believes, has not received sufficient attention in the study of human behaviour. Jung uses the concept of religion to describe a person's irrational experiences. Note should be taken that, for him, the spiritual or religious dimension is an idea much larger and more subtle than religious practice according to a specific denominational dogma. It includes all the

irrational aspects of being human. For Jung, the attainment of the self to which all human existence is directed is concerned especially with the religious dimension of the psyche. This elevates the human psyche to a spiritual plane above the usual physiological, social and psychic levels of existence.

It is the psychic and religious dimensions that receive special attention in Jung's theoretical views on the psyche, and through which he has made his greatest contribution to understanding the human psyche.

Self-evaluation question

- What is Jung's view concerning the importance of physiological processes and religion in studying the psyche?

4.4 The structure of the personality

What is the encompassing structural component identified by Jung to explain human functioning?

Jung's lifelong fascination with the human psyche and its functioning started in his early childhood. We might therefore regard the central theme in his work as an attempt '... to penetrate into the secret of personality' (Jung, 1961:232), and in this quest, he identified various structural components of the psyche.

KEY TERM

psyche: refers to the totality of all conscious and unconscious psychic processes of the individual

He uses the term **psyche** (derived from the Greek word '*psyche*' meaning 'spirit' or 'soul') as an encompassing structural component of the personality to refer to the 'totality of all conscious and unconscious psychic processes' (Jung, 1971:463). For him the psyche represents people and the world and, because it is so complex, it can be studied from various angles.

'The psyche is the greatest of all cosmic wonders and the *sine qua non* of the world as an object' (Jung, 1960:169). Although it is not always clear how Jung distinguishes between the concepts of *psyche*, *personality* and *soul*, it seems that 'psyche' is a comprehensive concept that encompasses universal human traits, whereas 'personality' (which he sometimes uses synonymously with 'soul') pertains specifically to individual functioning. For example, Jung (1971:464) uses the term 'personality' when discussing the plurality of the psyche, in the sense that a person's psyche may be 'split' into more than one personality, as in the expression 'angel abroad and devil at home'.

For Jung, the psyche is a dynamically structured totality or whole; not an indivisible whole, but rather a divisible or divided entity that continuously strives towards 'wholeness' (Jung, 1960:307). Although connected, the various components of the psyche function quite independently of one another. The components are, in most cases, in a polar relationship – personal and impersonal, conscious and

unconscious, internalised and externalised, constructive and destructive, public and private. For example, the one-sidedness of a person's conscious existence is constantly balanced by the operation of the unconscious. Despite the contrasting nature of the psyche's components, the main purpose of all life is a striving towards 'wholeness' through reconciling the polarities to bring about the eventual integration of the conscious and the unconscious into a whole (the self).

The *self*, which will be discussed in more detail later, as an *archetype* (that is, images or behaviour dispositions, which have been transmitted to humanity through generations), is the essence of the psyche and Jung (1953a:236) describes it as follows:

Intellectually the self is no more than a psychological concept, a construct that serves to express an unknowable essence which we cannot grasp as such, since by definition it transcends our powers of comprehension. It might equally well be called the 'God within us'.

Despite the efforts to conceptualise the self as the essence of the psyche, Jung (1971:460) describes the self in much the same way as he does the psyche: '... the self designates the whole range of psychic phenomena in man. It expresses the unity of the personality as a whole.' Ostensibly the difference between the psyche and the self is rooted in the fact that each psyche has the potential of becoming a self as soon as the opposing components of the psyche are integrated into a whole. In other words, the self can also be seen as a 'spiritualised or transcendental psyche' in which a new 'wholeness' exists because the opposing forces have been integrated.

Enrichment

Topographic representation of the psyche

Like Freud, Jung uses a topographic approach to indicate and spatially represent the various structural components or subsystems of personality. They borrow this approach from physiology and anatomy, in which it is customary to represent the various parts of the body and the connections between them topographically, once their exact location has been identified through dissection. Both Freud and Jung dissect the entire psyche, distinguishing subsystems and the connections between these subsystems. Figure 4.1 shows Jung's topographic representation of the structure of the psyche.

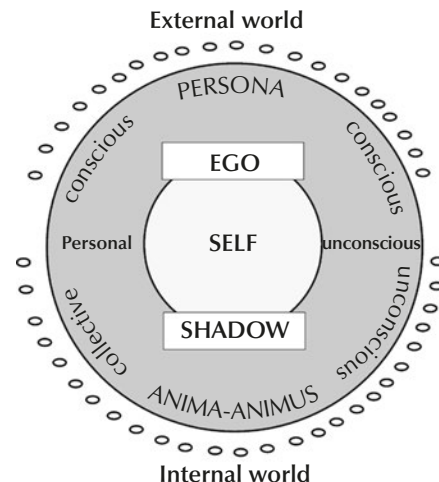


Figure 4.1 Jung's topographic representation of the structure of the psyche (adapted from Jacobi, 1942:164–126)

Source: Routledge & Kegan Paul

On which levels of consciousness does the psyche function, according to Jung?

According to Jung, the psyche functions on three levels of consciousness: the *conscious*, the *personal unconscious* and the *collective unconscious*.

4.4.1 The conscious

For Jung, the essence of the conscious is the *ego*, and the conscious is an essential prerequisite for its development. Ego consciousness, the conscious experience of the 'I', emanates from the unconscious. Jung maintains that a newborn's psychic life does not as yet possess perceivable ego consciousness but that this consciousness emanates from the infant's general overall awareness of stimuli (Jung, 1960:347).

The *ego* comprises all conscious aspects of functioning, including sensations, perceptions, feelings, thoughts, evaluations and active memory. The ego functions both externally and internally (Jung, 1960:323):

- **External functioning** is the process by which the ego helps to structure reality through sensory perception and thereby facilitates interaction with the external world. It is the ego that enables the individual to understand the physical world and the social world and to be active in them.
- **Internal functioning** refers to the way the ego structures the individual's awareness of him- or herself to bestow on the person his or her own identity, which remains fairly constant over time.

4.4.2 The personal unconscious

Each individual's personal unconscious is unique and can be regarded as the storeroom of individual experiences and interactions with the world and the accompanying interpretations of these experiences and interactions. The contents of the personal unconscious are usually available to consciousness and there is a continual interaction between the personal unconscious and the ego.

Jung distinguishes three ways in which the contents of the unconscious are formed (Jung, 1960:141):

- Mental data becomes unconscious because it loses its intensity and is forgotten.
- Some sensory impressions are not intense enough to penetrate through to the conscious, but do enter the psyche subliminally.
- Some mental information has been repressed to the unconscious.

For Jung, the most important contents of the personal unconscious are what he calls the *individual complexes*. He sees a complex as a transformed instinct (Jung, 1960:123): 'An instinct which has undergone too much psychization can take its revenge in the form of an autonomous complex.' A *complex* is a composite of ideas or experiences loaded with specific emotional intensity (Jung, 1960:311), and it has two components:

- one that is determined by repeated personal experiences in interaction with the environment
- another that is determined by archetypes and instincts from the collective unconscious (Jung, 1960:11).

In other words, a complex forms when an archetype or instinct is combined with a personal experience. For example, an individual can develop a *mother complex* when his or her own experience with a mother is combined with the archetype of a mother. In a similar way the individual can develop an *achievement complex*, a *power complex* or any other type of complex. Apart from repeated everyday experiences, Jung contends that traumas (emotional shocks) and moral conflicts are some of the more common factors leading to the development of complexes (Jung, 1960:98, 313).

Jung highlights the fact that the word ‘complex’ has become part of everyday colloquial vocabulary and that people fairly generally refer to their ‘complexes’. He points out, however, that it is not people who have complexes; rather, ‘complexes possess people’. A complex develops an autonomous existence and is usually repressed from the conscious. It continues to exist in the personal unconscious, from whence it functions as a kind of ‘splinter psyche’ that influences everyday life. In extreme cases, the repressed autonomous complex can lead to a fragmentation of the psyche, manifesting itself as a split personality or as a psychosis in which part of the personality splinters off (Jung, 1960:95–97; Noll, 1989).

4.4.3 The collective unconscious

KEY TERM

collective unconscious: an inherited potential or ‘blueprint’, which has been transmitted from previous generations, and which forms the inherited foundation of the individual psyche

The **collective unconscious** (also known as the *transpersonal unconscious*) is one of Jung’s most original and most controversial concepts. The collective unconscious represents the inherited potential that has been transmitted from previous generations. It is a kind of ‘blueprint’, not peculiar to the individual but universal to all human beings – and possibly to animals as well – which forms the foundation of the individual psyche. The collective unconscious exists completely independently and is not influenced by the personal unconscious and/or conscious experience (Jung, 1960:148). However, it does influence the conscious and Jung describes it thus (Jung, 1960:112):

The collective unconscious comprises in itself the psychic life of ancestors right back to the earliest beginnings. It is the matrix of all conscious psychic occurrences, and hence it exerts an influence that comprises the freedom of consciousness in the highest degree, since it is continually striving to lead all conscious processes back into the old paths.

KEY TERM

archetypes: the main content of the collective unconscious; they are innate primordial psychic predispositions or ‘intuitions’, which influence a person to perceive and experience in a certain way

The collective unconscious contains *instincts* and *archetypes*. Although Jung uses ‘instinct’ and ‘archetype’ as interchangeable concepts, it appears that instincts refer more to physiologically inherited impulses that determine behaviour without conscious motivation, whereas **archetypes** or *primordial images* (*‘Urbild’*) are regarded as innate psychic predispositions or ‘intuitions’, influencing the person to perceive in a certain way, to experience and form images. Martin-Vallas (2013) points out that Jung’s concept of archetype cannot be reduced to a univocal definition, because Jung himself proposed several definitions – some partially or

totally contradictory. The archetypes form the basis for human thought and are ‘the whole treasure-house of mythological motifs’ (Jung, 1960:310). For example, maternal love, as an archetype, is not acquired by imitation or through one’s experience of one’s own mother. Instead, a mother is compelled to act maternally by an inherited predisposition emanating from the collective unconscious.

Below is a link to a YouTube video, *Carl Jung – The Collective Unconscious*, in which T Todd (2012) discusses Jung’s collective unconscious and archetypes.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRaXf_fNhno

Jung states that archetypes can be expressed through *symbols*, the external manifestation of archetypes. A symbol is the perceivable sign of something imperceptible; in other words, a symbol always represents something else that is not perceivable. Jung (1964a:4) is of the opinion that ‘... a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning’. It is only through the analysis and interpretation of symbols – as is evident in dreams, fantasies, visions, myths, art and so on – that the collective unconscious and the archetypes can be analysed and understood (Jung, 1964a:83–90).

Self-evaluation question

- What is the most important difference and/or similarity between Freud’s view of a drive (instinct) and Jung’s archetypes (instincts)?

Activity

Now that you are acquainted with Jung’s view of a ‘complex’ and an ‘archetype’, try to establish the nature and origin of your own mother- and father complex.

Although an archetype exists for each universal human experience, what are the most important archetypes described by Jung?

According to Jung, an archetype exists for each universal human experience and he lists a great variety of archetypes, including birth, death, sun, darkness, power, women, men, sex, water, mother and pain. However, he discusses only a few in detail, namely the *persona*, the *anima*, the *animus*, the *shadow* and the *self*.

The persona

Persona, the Greek word used by Jung to describe a person’s public self, means ‘mask’ or ‘façade’. It develops in relation to the role that the individual must fulfil in society. It also reflects the individual’s perception of his or her expected role in society and it reveals how he or she would like to be perceived by others. Jung (1959a:123) describes the **persona** as follows: ‘... the persona is that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is.’ The persona usually consists of various masks, for example an individual could reveal a reserved, reticent persona at work, at home he might behave impulsively and demonstratively towards his wife and children, and on the sports field he could come across as a jovial team member.

KEY TERM

persona: describes a person’s public self and reflects the expected role played in society

For Jung it is wrong to equate the persona and the whole psyche. When individuals identify with their personas to such an extent that the psyche and the persona become almost identical, they are not only deceiving themselves in terms of

identity, but also risking alienating themselves from their genuine emotions and experiences. When the persona assumes too important a role within the psyche, neurosis or pathology can develop (Jung, 1953a:154–160).

Activity

Using Jung's view of the persona, can you identify the different personas you use in your dealings with other people? (For example, how does the persona you reveal to members of your family at home differ from, or correspond to, the persona you adopt at work in your dealings with your colleagues? Or are they all the same persona with the true 'I' emerging in all circumstances?)

KEY TERMS

anima: the female archetype present in every male person at an unconscious level

animus: the male archetype present in every female person at an unconscious level

The anima and animus

Jung holds that a person possesses not only the physiological traits of both sexes (for example sex hormones), but also the psychological traits of both sexes, such as emotions, attitudes and values. He therefore postulates the **anima** as the female archetype that is present in every male at an unconscious level, and the **animus** as the male archetype that is present in every female at an unconscious level. At the unconscious level, the anima represents feelings and emotionalism in men, while the animus represents logic and rationality in women. Jung (1954b:198) maintains:

Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image. This image is ... an imprint or 'archetype' of all the ancestral experiences of the female, a deposit, as it were, of all the impressions ever made by woman ... The same is true of woman: she too has her inborn image of man ... Since this image is unconscious, it is always unconsciously projected upon the beloved, and is one of the chief reasons for passionate attraction or aversion.

Jung indicates that the persona (the external personality) is usually in a supplementary relationship to the anima or the animus (the internal personality). The anima or animus contains qualities that are lacking in the persona. For example, a woman who is externally extremely feminine will have an extremely masculine internal psyche and a highly masculine man will be highly feminine internally. On this basis, Jung (1971:469) says:

This explains why it is just those very virile men who are most subject to characteristic weaknesses; their attitude to the unconscious has a womanish weakness and impressionability. Conversely, it is often just the most feminine women who, in their inner lives, display an intractability, an obstinacy, and a wilfulness that are to be found with comparable intensity only in a man's outer attitude.

When the anima and the animus combine with personal experience to form a complex, the anima and animus play a vital role in determining the behaviour of the two sexes towards each other, their understanding of each other and their choice of a partner. If, for instance, a man's anima emphasises dependency and tenderness and his personal experience with women (represented initially by his mother) emphasises passivity as a female characteristic, he could very well misunderstand a woman with a self-assertive and competitive personality by regarding her as extremely aggressive. A woman whose animus emphasises aggression and who equates her personal experience of masculinity with hunting and adventure could, in turn, misjudge a man who is interested in cooking and home-care as being weak or effeminate.

The process of choosing a marriage partner, however, is far more complex because the anima and the animus in combination with the father- and the mother complex form unconscious projections, according to which people of the opposite sex and/or opposite personalities attract each other.

An adult creative person is one who succeeds in integrating both the masculine and feminine components of the personality by allowing enough expression to both aspects of the psyche. If a man denies his anima and a woman denies her animus, they negate the existence of an important part of their psyche and this denial can lead to problems, especially in their relationships with people of the opposite sex. However, a man's overemphasis on his anima and a woman's on her animus could lead to homosexuality.

Walker (1991) remarks that homosexuality has not initially received much attention from Jungian psychology. Jung himself believed that homosexuality results from immaturity as a result of an infantile relationship to the feminine, which he variously termed as a 'mother complex', 'anima identification' or 'unconscious matriarchal psychology' (Hopcke, 1988: 68). In contrast to Jung's interpretation of homosexuality as immature and abnormal, analytic writers such as Hopcke (1988 & 1989), Walker (1991) and Hopcke, Carrington & Wirth (1993) shift the emphasis to the full individuation of a homosexual identity similar to the individuation of a heterosexual identity, with the only difference embedded in the sexual erotic orientation. McKenzie (2006) presents a revised Jung gender theory transcending the limitations of Jung's anima/animus concepts by incorporating principles of the cognitive and developmental neurosciences.

Self-evaluation question

- How do the *anima/animus* and the *persona* play a role in establishing relationships with the opposite or same sex?

KEY TERM

shadow: represents the inherited primitive animal instincts of a person

The shadow

The **shadow** represents the primitive animal instincts inherited by humanity in the evolutionary process from the lower forms of life. The shadow is probably the strongest but also the most dangerous archetype because it contains the impulsive urges and emotions normally unacceptable to society and is therefore repressed. Jung poses two possible reasons for the shadow's repression:

- The norms of society are usually irreconcilable with the shadow's impulses and society expects its members to conform to its norms. The more the societal norms, the larger the shadow and the stronger the repression.
- The shadow might be repressed when its impulses are irreconcilable with and threatening to the persona (Jung, 1959b:8).

The shadow is not purely a negative force, however. It is also the source of vitality, spontaneity and creativity, corresponding partially to Freud's *id* in the sense of being a source of vital energy (Jung, 1959b:266). Integration of the ego and the

shadow leads to creative behaviour, and a person who achieves such integration shows effective and appropriate behaviour in a crisis. The person who represses his or her shadow or channels it inappropriately can behave destructively towards himself or herself and others, and is overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy in a crisis because the impulses of his or her repressed shadow are not to be relied upon. People who deny their shadow are people who do not fully acknowledge their humanness and resemble individuals incapable of casting shadows.

Self-evaluation question

- What differences and/or similarities can be identified between Freud's *id* and Jung's *shadow*?

KEY TERM

self: expresses the attainment of unity ('wholeness') by integrating the opposing forces of the psyche

The self

The **self** is an archetype that motivates an individual to integrate the various components of the psyche into a harmonious whole. It represents a person's striving towards unity, integration, completeness and wholeness. The self surfaces when the conscious and unconscious are no longer in opposition to each other and accept each other to form a greater whole. According to Jung, the self is the central archetype and forms the nucleus of the personality around which all the other systems cluster. 'The self is not only the centre, but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the centre of this totality, just as the ego is the centre of consciousness' (Jung, 1953b:41).

KEY TERM

transcendent function: refers to the development of a synthesis between the opposed differentiated systems of the psyche

Although Jung is not always clear about the development and dynamics of the self, its development appears to be powered by a religious instinct and a **transcendent function**, which compel the psyche to strive towards transcending its opposing systems and integrating them into a new state of balance and unity. Jung (1958b) maintains that religion is an instinct peculiar to human beings with the main purpose of maintaining psychic balance.

The archetype of the self is present from birth, but the *attainment of selfhood* emerges only during the middle years of life. The attainment of selfhood is reached after the psyche has become fully differentiated into various systems through the *process of individuation*, when these differentiated, opposing systems are synthesised into a new unity or wholeness by means of the *transcendent function*. For Jung, the transcendent function is a developmental principle, whereby he seeks to explain how the psyche is able to achieve wholeness after differentiating into various subsystems. (The process of individuation and the transcendent function are discussed in greater detail in the section on the development of personality.)

The archetype of the self is manifested in various symbols, such as the *mandala* (Sanskrit for 'circle'), which plays an important role in Jung's theory, signifying the wholeness or unity of the psyche (Jung, 1959a). As Smith (1990:96) puts it: '... the self is a psychological expression of wholeness, the mandala is its visual representation, symbolizing the "complete man".'

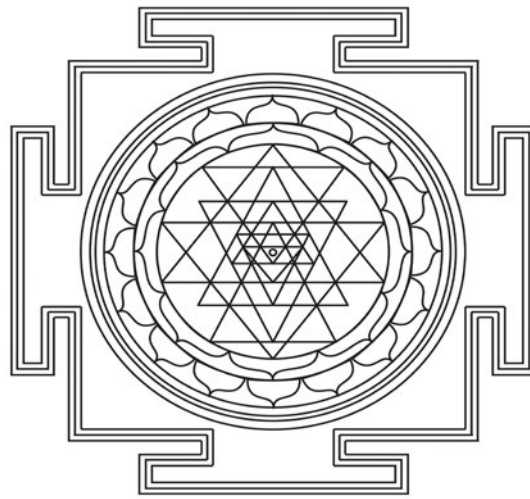


Figure 4.2 A depiction of a mandala
Source: Fotolia: 94714100

The mandala is a geometric pattern comprising a square with four quarters containing a circle with a centre point, which serves as a symbol of unity and completeness in many Eastern religions. For example, it is used as an aid during meditation in Tibetan Buddhism. It also appears in many other cultural, religious and historical contexts.

For Jung it represents a graphical representation of the self and he used to draw a mandala every morning in order to observe his psychic transformation from day to day (Barreda, 2003; Fincher, 2015). Presently it is frequently used in art therapy and therapy with children (Fincher, 2015).

Activity

Draw your own mandala. Designing your own mandala can be both a spiritual experience and therapeutic. In essence it represents a relation between your inner world (unconscious) and the outer reality. It is seen as a tool for meditation and increased self-awareness. There are several helpful websites on how to draw a mandala, such as: www.art-is-fun.com/how-to-draw-a-mandala.html.

Self-evaluation question

- Several other theories, such as those of Horney, Maslow and Rogers, employ the concept 'self'. What are the major differences between these respective views of the self?

4.5 The dynamics of the personality

What are the basic assumptions underlying Jung's explanation of human functioning?

Before explaining Jung's views on the dynamics of personality, it is necessary to look at the fundamental assumptions that underlie his view of dynamics.

4.5.1 Basic assumptions

Freud's psychodynamic approach is based exclusively on a causal approach that regards people as mechanisms propelled into activity by the id instincts and behaviour as the outcome of their psychosexual past. Although Jung himself, to

some extent, employs a *causal approach* in assigning an important determining role to the personal unconscious (the complexes) and the collective unconscious (the archetypes) in causing behaviour, he still insists on a *teleological future perspective*. For Jung, the individual's behaviour is not only the outcome of past forces, which drive him or her into action, but also the result of the individual's (psyche) striving for completeness and wholeness through the attainment of the self.

KEY TERM

synchronicity: refers to a relationship between events that is not causal or teleological, but can only be described as a 'meaningful concurrence' between the events

Later Jung added a third principle to the causal and goal-directed principles underlying the dynamics of behaviour, namely **synchronicity**. According to this principle, the causes of behaviour are not to be sought in the past, nor in the future, but in a 'meaningful concurrence' between events. Behaviour is therefore not explained in terms of causes because what is significant is the fact that events occur concurrently (Jung, 1960:485). Jung (1960:516) calls it a 'modality without a cause, an 'acausal orderedness'.

Example

If a clock stops the moment its owner dies, or if a person thinks of a friend the moment the telephone starts ringing and answers it to find that it is that particular friend on the line, this does not mean that one event caused the other. These events are merely synchronistic events (that is, events occurring concurrently) that have a significant meaning for the people who experienced them.

Jung maintains that the significance of such events lies in their simultaneous occurrence and that they should not be attributed to coincidence or chance. Behavioural phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance and other para-psychological phenomena can be understood and described, according to Jung, only as a consequence of an acausal synchronistic relationship.

Activity

Have you ever had a synchronistic experience? What actually happened and have you often had this type of experience? What do other people think when you tell them about it? Do they see it as coincidence or not? Remember that the importance of synchronistic events is found in the personal meaning that you yourself attach to them.

4.5.2 The human being as an energy system

What are the forces that propel a person to physical or psychological action, according to Jung?

KEY TERM

psychic energy: a hypothetical construct which refers to the 'life energy' of the personality, as it is expressed in all psychic attitudes and functions

Like Freud, Jung regards the human being as a complex energy system. Jung uses the term *libido* to refer to physical as well as psychic energy. **Psychic energy** or 'life energy' is specifically the energy of the personality. For Jung, psychic energy is a hypothetical construct and therefore not directly observable. Psychic energy is expressed in all psychic attitudes and functions, as well as in the psyche's attempt to achieve a balance between its various subsystems.

Jung states that both physical and psychic energy are generated internally by the metabolic processes and that there is mutual interaction between psychic and physical energy, although he does not describe the specific nature of the interaction (Jung, 1960:3–6; 14–18). The psyche can also acquire further energy from outside through individual experiences. Just as the body absorbs food and transforms it into energy, so, Jung believes, people’s psychic experiences are ‘digested’ and converted into psychic energy.

The intensity of the psychic energy invested in a psychic activity is a *psychic value*. Although psychic energy cannot be measured directly, the psychic value of a conscious activity can be inferred from the amount of time and attention devoted to it. Determining the psychic value of an unconscious activity is more difficult because the strength (‘constellatory power’) of the complex has to be determined. Jung (1960:9–14) distinguishes two ways of establishing the strength of unconscious psychic values:

- complex indicators
- word-association test (this will be explained in more detail later).

Example of a complex indicator

If an adult male lives with his mother, often talks about her and spends a lot of time with her friends, these indicators could be signs of a mother complex.

Self-evaluation question

- Discuss Jung’s view of psychic energy and how its strength is established.

The distribution of psychic energy

As Jung assumes that the human being is an energy system, how does he apply principles of thermodynamics to explain human functioning?

According to Jung, there are two principles that determine how energy is distributed throughout psychic functioning, that is, the *principle of equality* and the *principle of entropy*. These two principles are derived from *thermodynamics*. (Thermodynamics is the science of the relationship of heat as a source of energy to other sources of energy, and, in particular, the conversion of heat into mechanical energy.) Normally these principles apply only to closed systems, but Jung is of the opinion that they can also be applied to the functioning of the psyche, despite the fact that the psyche is only a partially closed system.

(a) The principle of equality

The *principle of equality* (or conservation of energy) postulates that the psyche conserves energy and it never loses or adds to it. Energy lost in one component of the system will simply reappear in another component. For example, if an individual’s persona becomes weakened through therapy, libidinal energy will be

withdrawn from the archetype of the persona. However, this energy is conserved and may be transferred to the archetype of the shadow, thereby strengthening the ‘primitive’, unacceptable part of the psyche. The process of redistributing energy in the psyche takes place continuously (Jung, 1960:18–25).

(b) The principle of entropy

The *principle of entropy* (or balance) postulates that energy flows from a stronger (or warmer) element to a weaker (or colder) element. The psyche therefore constantly tries to maintain a balance between the different subsystems through the redistribution of energy from stronger to weaker components. Ideally, the psyche strives to create a situation in which all the subsystems have an equal amount of psychic energy at their disposal so that a system of total balance can exist. When, for instance, the shadow becomes too strong, according to the principle of entropy, the psychic energy will be re-channelled to a weaker ego or persona (Jung, 1960:25–28).

Since the psyche is only a partially closed system, a state of complete equality and balance will never be realised because the psyche does ‘lose’ psychic energy through mental activities and it can obtain additional energy through metabolic processes and individual experiences.

Activity

Take a long balloon that consists of various ball-shaped sections and see if you can illustrate Jung’s two principles of the distribution of psychic energy.

The *principle of equality* can be demonstrated by flattening one of the ball-shaped sections; in other words, by forcing the air out of that specific space. The balloon does not lose air (that is, the psyche does not lose psychic energy), but the other ball-shaped sections grow bigger because of the air (psychic energy) that is forced into them.

The *principle of entropy* can be demonstrated by the fact that different ball-shaped sections always try to maintain an equal size. When the air is not forced out of a space, it will always be evenly distributed throughout the whole balloon (the psyche strives to have an equal amount of energy in all subsystems).

The term ‘channelling of the libido’ (Jung, 1960:41) refers to the distribution of psychic energy, or the process whereby energy is transferred or transformed:

I mean by this a transfer of psychic intensities or values from one content to another, a process corresponding to the physical transformation of energy; for example, in the steam-engine the conversion of heat into the pressure of steam and then into energy of motion. Similarly, the energy of certain psychological phenomena is converted by suitable means into other dynamics.

According to Jung, the libido is channelled largely by means of two processes, namely *progression* and *regression*. In line with Freud, however, he also gives attention to the role played by *sublimation* and *repression*.

- **Progression** is defined by Jung (1960:32) as ‘... the daily advance of the process of psychological adaptation’ to environmental conditions. Progression, therefore, takes place when the ego successfully adapts to the demands of the environment and the needs of the unconscious, so that the flow of energy reconciles these opposing forces.
- **Regression** is an adaptation to the inner world that occurs whenever the flow of energy is blocked, preventing a successful compromise between the opposing systems. Regression need not necessarily be negative, as Freud would have it. For Jung, regression may make it easier to access useful knowledge from the personal unconscious or the collective unconscious (usually through dreams), thereby counteracting one-sided development of the psyche and promoting greater harmony within it. Jung (1960:36) states, that ‘regression leads to the necessity of adapting to the inner world of the psyche’.

Example

A man constantly conforms to the social demands of masculinity and never expresses his emotions, for example through tears, thereby repressing his anima; his psychic energy is blocked because opposing forces cannot be reconciled. Through regression, more energy could be channelled to the anima, and the man might then have a dream about a woman crying. This compensates for the one-sidedness at the conscious level and facilitates the inner adaptation of the psyche.

According to Jung, progression and regression should be regarded as *transitional* stages in the flow of energy, and not as mutually exclusive processes. Jung (1960: 39–40) illustrates this point as follows:

Man is not a machine in the sense that he can consistently maintain the same output of work. He can meet the demands of outer necessity in an ideal way only if he is also adapted to his own inner world, that is, if he is in harmony with himself. Conversely, he can only adapt to his inner world and achieve harmony with himself when he is adapted to environment conditions ... Looked at from this angle, progression and the adaptation resulting therefrom are means to regression, to a manifestation of the inner world in the outer.

Jung states, however, that regression can pose a great danger to the psyche if the re-channelled energy from the unconscious threatens to overwhelm the ego, thus causing psychotic or neurotic behaviour.

- **Sublimation** is the displacement of energy from an instinctive or less differentiated process to a more **differentiated** process, usually of a cultural or spiritual nature.

Example

A woman decides, as a result of frustrated love, to enter the nursing profession or become a social worker, thereby displacing her love and transforming it into loving care.

- **Repression** takes place when conscious impulses threaten the ego or persona and are repressed to the unconscious.

Example

A person may experience homosexual tendencies as threatening and may therefore repress them. Since this energy is not destroyed, the psychic energy may build up in his or her unconscious until it is manifested in the launching of an intense anti-homosexual campaign.

Interaction between subsystems of the psyche

Although the psyche strives throughout life to attain a dynamic unity between the subsystems, these subsystems are in continual interaction because of the redistribution of energy. Jung differentiates three forms of interaction in these subsystems, namely *opposition*, *compensation* and *synthesis*.

(a) Opposition

This is one of the central dynamic principles of Jung's theory. According to this principle, most subsystems are in a polar relationship to one another so that they can generate the tension essential for life. Without tension there would be no energy and therefore no psyche or even life. This is one of the contradictions in Jung's theory. On the one hand he postulates that the psyche strives towards a tensionless state (balance between all the subsystems), and on the other hand he maintains that the tension caused by imbalance is essential for life. The question at issue is whether or not Jung believed the purpose of the psyche to be death (a tensionless state).

Even though the psyche strives towards a tensionless state, opposing forces exist everywhere in the psyche, for example between the conscious and unconscious, the persona and shadow, introversion and extraversion, anima and animus, etcetera.

(b) Compensation

With compensation, Jung claims that opposites attract and complement each other. Through compensation the psyche prevents a lopsided development of a subsystem which could lead to neuroses or psychoses. Compensation occurs mostly between the conscious and unconscious. The overemphasis of a characteristic or function on the conscious level is compensated for by emphasising the opposite characteristic or function on the unconscious level. Dominant masculinity on the conscious level, for example, is compensated for by the anima on the unconscious level. Dreams with archetypal contents compensate for the repressed archetypes.

(c) Synthesis

In contrast to Freud, Jung believes that people are not condemned to perpetual conflict but that they can effect a union (synthesis) between opposing systems. Such unity can be achieved only through the transcendent function according to which opposing forces can be integrated in the development of the self.

4.5.3 Attitudes of the psyche

Did Jung distinguish between various personality types and, if so, how?

KEY TERMS

introversion: an inner directedness and flow of psychic energy indicating a person who is preoccupied with his or her own emotions and experiences

extraversion: an outer directedness and flow of psychic energy indicating a person who reveals a lively interest in the world around him or her

Parallel with the processes of progression and regression, Jung (1960:40) distinguishes two types of attitudes or orientations towards the internal or external world in terms of the direction in which psychic energy is channelled: **introversion** and **extraversion**. He explains the connection between these two pairs of concepts as follows: 'Progression, as adaptation to the outer conditions, could be regarded as extraversion; regression, as adaptation to the inner conditions, could be regarded as introversion.' Of all Jung's concepts, introversion and extraversion are probably the most famous, especially since they have also been established as personality types. Nowadays these concepts are part of the general terminology in psychology and are also often used in everyday language.

For Jung, each individual can be characterised as oriented primarily inwardly or primarily outwardly according to the primary channelling of psychic energy.

- **Introversion** is an inner directedness of psychic energy based on the subjective experiences of the ego. An introvert sources energy from within and is preoccupied with his or her own emotions and experiences and often appears to be aloof and even asocial.
- **Extraversion**, by contrast, sources energy from the outside world and from other people, and is directed towards external reality – people, objects and events outside the ego – rather than individual experiences or subjective perceptions. The extravert reveals a lively interest in the world around him or her and appears highly sociable.

Even though both attitudes are present in all people, one is usually dominant and conscious and the other unconscious and subordinate. The subordinate and unconscious orientation is able to assert itself as the dominant attitude in dreams or in extraordinary circumstances (Jung, 1971). A person who is normally withdrawn and reserved can become self-assertive and aggressive under the influence of alcohol.

4.5.4 Functions of the psyche

Apart from its two attitudes, the psyche also has four functions, namely *sensation*, *intuition*, *thinking* and *feeling* (Jung, 1960:123). Jung further classifies the four functions as *irrational* functions (sensation and intuition) and *rational* functions (thinking and feeling).

Irrational functions

The irrational functions refer to the way the psyche collects information and orients itself towards outer reality, and also how it reacts to stimulation directly without rational considerations coming into play.

- **Sensation** refers to the way in which the psyche experiences external impulses through the senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

- **Intuition** is unconscious perception on a subliminal level. Through this the psyche is elevated beyond the bodily confines of time and space and what happens is an ‘immediate experience and consciousness’, which cannot be achieved by any of the other functions.

Rational functions

The rational functions indicate indirect ways of processing information and indirect ways of reacting on the basis of a rational decision process.

- **Thinking** is a logical and structuring function directed towards the objective explanation and understanding of the world. It is therefore the function that the psyche uses to interpret what has been perceived.
- **Feeling** is an evaluative function by which information is judged as good or bad, right or wrong, positive or negative. It forms the basis for the individual’s experience of subjective feelings of pleasure, sadness, anger or love.

4.5.5 Personality types that develop from combining and handling attitudes and functions

As is the case with attitudes, one function is usually conscious and dominant while the others are unconscious and secondary. Each function can also be manifested in an introverted or extraverted way. Although one of the functions is usually dominant, Jung (1958b:167) emphasises that all four are present in every person:

... In order to orient ourselves, we must have a function which ascertains that something is there (sensation); a second function which establishes what it is (thinking); a third function which states whether it suits us or not, whether we wish to accept it or not (feeling); and a fourth function which indicates where it came from and where it is going (intuition).

When the attitudes and functions are combined, eight personality types can be distinguished on the basis of the dominant attitude and function.

Jung insists that he does not want to categorise people rigidly with his typology. Rather, the typology should be viewed as a framework according to which individual psyches can be distinguished from one another based on their preference for channelling psychic energy. The eight personality types are described as follows:

- **Extravert-thinking type:** This type of person perceives the world as structured and lives according to fixed objective rules and all subjective feelings are repressed. This type of person is generally cold and unfeeling and is usually found among scientists and researchers.
- **Extravert-feeling type:** A person in this category is emotionally highly labile and the emotions fluctuate as situations change. Such a person is social and experiences intense relationships, but these relationships are often of short duration. Actors are usually representative of this type.
- **Extravert-sensing type:** The individual here is characteristically highly pragmatic and realistic and accepts life as it is without thinking too much about it. Such a person is generally sensual and geared towards experiencing pleasure. This type is found among businessmen and businesswomen.

- **Extravert-intuitive type:** Such people are always looking for something new and find it difficult to sustain anything – ideas, jobs or relationships. This personality type includes impulsive inventors and creative innovators, who have difficulty finding stability and concentrating on anything for long.
- **Introvert-thinking type:** People with this type of personality are highly intellectual and care little about their day-to-day existence. This group includes people who are ascetic, philosophical, impractical, socially inhibited and extremely private.
- **Introvert-feeling type:** People with this personality type are intensely emotional and hypersensitive. They do not display the characteristics outwardly but they manifest themselves in writing and works of art.
- **Introvert-sensing type:** The individual in this grouping takes life as it comes without displaying great social involvement. People in this category generally do not give much of themselves in interaction and can be described as passive, calm and boring.
- **Introvert-intuitive type:** This personality type includes eccentric thinkers and daydreamers who are known for brilliant theories and creative ideas based mostly on intuition. They tend to be highly impractical and asocial, and other people often do not understand them correctly. However, sometimes their intuitive ideas can be implemented successfully by others.

According to Jung, a person's personality type can be identified only when the relative strength of his or her psychic attitudes and functions has been ascertained through long-term analysis and therapy. He also points out that attempts to change an individual's personality type can lead to neurosis.

Enrichment

Daryl Sharp's book *Personality Types: Jung's Model of Typology* (1987) provides a detailed discussion of Jung's typology, which could serve as a tool for psychological orientation and understanding of both oneself and the interpersonal difficulties arising in human relationships. Daryl Sharp is the publisher and editor of *Inner City Books*, a company specialising in studies of Jungian Psychology by Jungian analysts with the aim of promoting the understanding and practical applications of Jungian Psychology. A free book download is available of this book, as well as several other books on Jungian Psychology at: <http://www.innercitybooks.net/freedownloads.html>

Activity

Now that you know Jung's eight personality types well, you should try to describe your own personality. Which type describes the person who is closest to you emotionally? Without telling that person what type you chose, ask him or her to read through the personality types and decide which types he or she thinks best describe your respective personalities. Compare your choices and discuss them using Jung's theory. (If you are two opposites that attract each other, can you see the role of a father- and mother complex in the attraction to the person who is emotionally close to you? Can you trace the role of the anima and animus in your mutual relationship?)

4.6 The development of the personality

How did Jung explain the development of the psyche?

In contrast to Freud's psychosexual and Erikson's psychosocial developmental stages, Jung does not devote much attention to early development or to various stages of personality development. He concentrates instead on the process of *individuation* and the *transcendent function*, which he believes is the baseline of all development inspired by the archetype of self.

4.6.1 Individuation

KEY TERM

individuation: the process whereby the undifferentiated psyche divides into subsystems

Individuation is the process whereby the infant's undifferentiated psyche divides into subsystems. Each of the subsystems – ego, persona, shadow, anima, animus, etcetera – strives to differentiate itself fully from the infant-psyche and to develop into an integrated system on its own. Jung (1953a:108, 171) describes the purpose of individuation as follows:

The meaning and purpose of the process is the realization, in all its aspects, of the personality originally hidden away in the embryonic germ-plasm; the production and unfolding of the original, potential wholeness ... Individuation means becoming a single, homogenous being, and, in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as 'becoming to selfhood' or 'self-realisation'.

4.6.2 Transcendent function

The **transcendent function**, however, refers to how the person's development of a synthesis between the opposed differentiated systems of the psyche can be achieved in attaining the self. This implies bringing the conscious and unconscious together through the integration of opposing aspects of the personality into a whole (self) (Jung, 1960:73). Jung (1953a:108) says that 'The transcendent function ... leads to the revelation of the essential man'. But it is not always clear exactly what he means by the transcendent function. Wilson (1984:86–87) is of the opinion that in one respect the function is a 'desire for mental health' in people and that in another respect, Jung regards the transcendent function as '... man's religious drive, the craving to evolve to a higher level ... towards the hero, the saint or the sage'.

Self-evaluation question

- Discuss Jung's view of the development of personality and determine how it differs from Freud's psychosexual and Erikson's psychosocial views of development.

4.7 The optimal development of the personality

How does Jung describe an optimal functioning person and is it attainable by everybody?

Jung believes that optimal development lies in *attaining the self*. This usually occurs in the early middle years of a person's life as a result of the individuation process and the transcendent function. Optimal development occurs when there is a blurring of the boundaries between what is conscious and unconscious and between the individual and the world, so that the person becomes part of a new and greater union as the opposing processes and forces in the psyche are synthesised. Jung (1953a:176) describes the optimal stage as follows:

... the more we become conscious of ourselves through self-knowledge, and act accordingly, the more the layer of the personal unconscious that is superimposed on the collective unconscious will be diminished. In this way there arises a consciousness which is no longer imprisoned in the petty, oversensitive, personal world of objective interests. This widened consciousness is no longer that touchy, egotistical bundle of personal wishes, fear, hopes, and ambitions which always has to be compensated or corrected by unconscious countertendencies; instead, it is a relationship ... bringing the individual into absolute, binding, and indissoluble communion with the world at large.

For Jung, optimal development is found not only in achieving a 'midpoint' and a balance between polarities, but also in adapting to the transition from an externally oriented adjustment. Jacobi (1942) states that people, according to Jung, devote the first part of their lives to the differentiation of the psyche and the definition of their egos in terms of their adaptation to external reality, that is, to mastering the problems involving sexuality, work, marriage, children and interpersonal relationships in general. When these external adjustments have been accomplished, and when the psyche's attitude towards external reality has been consolidated, the psyche can direct its energy towards the inner reality in trying to establish a genuine interior union. Jung (1953a:73) also alludes to the transition from an outer directedness to an inner directedness as a transition from a natural to a cultural existence. He expresses this view as follows:

Man has two aims: the first is the natural aim, the begetting of children and the business of protecting the brood ... When this aim has been reached a new phase begins; the acquisition of money and social cultural aim. For the attainment of the former we have the help of nature and, on top of that education; for the attainment of the latter, little or nothing helps ... this is what makes the transition from the natural to the cultural phase so terribly difficult.

Although, as Jung points out, the transition from a natural to a cultural existence is difficult and is only achieved by some individuals, it is a necessary requirement for mental health and optimal development. Jung therefore not only equates psychic health with optimal development, he also views mental health as an ideal condition. Jung (1954b:86) states that '[a] spiritual goal that points beyond the purely natural man and his worldly existence is an absolute necessity for the health of the soul'.

According to Jung (1953a:235), those who reach optimal development through the attainment of the self are not only '... on one side a being of superior wisdom and on the other side a being of superior will', they are also the conveyors of the culture and the

augmenters of human civilisation. With a few exceptions, among them Jesus Christ and Buddha, Jung believes that few people attain the ideal of optimal development, namely the state of complete differentiation (individuation) and synthesis (transcendancy).

Activity

Take a good look at yourself and determine how far you have travelled along the path of optimal development in attaining selfhood and wholeness, according to Jung's view.

4.8 Views on psychopathology

Did Jung draw a clear distinction between normal functioning and psychopathology?

For Jung there is only a difference of degree between psychopathology and normality. *Neurotic phenomena* (Jung, 1961:148) should not be regarded exclusively as signs of a sick psyche, but rather, at most, as pathological exaggerations of normal phenomena, since 'at the bottom we discover nothing new and unknown in the mentally ill'. Jung (1964b:167) goes so far as to state:

Neurosis is by no means merely a negative thing, it is also something positive. Only a soulless rationalism reinforced by a narrow materialistic outlook could possibly have overlooked this fact. In reality the neurosis contains the patient's psyche, or at least part of it; and if the rationalist pretends the neurosis could be plucked from him like a bad tooth, he would have gained nothing but would have lost something very essential to him.

Jung's view that a neurosis can provide valuable insight into the functioning of the psyche, and that it should therefore be explored rather than eliminated, was further elaborated by the post-Jungian James Hillman (1972; 1975; 1997).

Enrichment

Hillman maintains that theories on psychopathology have neglected the soul and its language (that is, the imagination) more than any other branch of psychology, since imagination has traditionally been regarded as '... morally suspect and ontologically inferior by Western rational tradition' (Hillman, 1972:177). Since normality is defined as compliance with the demands of reason and volition, any deviation from rationality and volition constitutes pathology, and the imagination and contact with fantasies must perforce also be pathological.

Hillman (1975) seeks to transcend the medical and theological models, which define pathology as a disease or sin in terms of a deviation from a set norm or value outside the individual. His view, by contrast, is that pathology should not be regarded as a deviation from a norm, but as a message conveyed by the psyche, and that one should treat pathology by exploring the personal myth that underlies it. Accordingly, Hillman (1975:57) prefers to use the term 'pathologising' (instead of pathology) to refer to the psyche's

... autonomous ability to create illness, morbidity, disorder, abnormality, and suffering in any aspect of behavior and to experience and imagine life through this deformed and afflicted perspective.

(continued)

What Hillman (1972) proposes is that the language of reason, consciousness or ego should be translated into the language of the unconscious and understood in its archetypal context, so that concepts such as depression, paranoia and mania are traced back to metaphors and their mythological origins. He advocates a return to the Greeks for an 'archaeology of fantasy and imagination' because classical mythology provides the images and meaning in terms of which the soul, whether healthy or sick, can be understood.

Although depression, for example, is one of the main problems of people today, Hillman (1975:99) argues that it should not necessarily be regarded as a negative condition but rather as a condition by which the depths of the soul could be explored.

Hillman (1972:157) also points out that hallucinations, sexual perversions, and transcendent and out-of-body experiences such as astral projection are culturally- and period-bound phenomena; what is regarded as normal behaviour in one culture and period may well be regarded as abnormal in another:

History tells us that the style of each age and culture has its 'psychology' and its 'psychopathology'.

Pathology is caused, according to Jung, by the lopsided development of one part or one system of the psyche (as in a *neurosis*), or the fragmentation of a system when that system develops a totally autonomous existence (as in the case of a *psychosis*). A one-sided development, or in extreme cases fragmentation, is caused by the blocking or damming up of libido in one system. That is, the psyche is not able to spread psychic energy in accordance with the principles of equality and entropy to bring about a state of balance.

Normality, however, is a condition in which corresponding systems exist in a harmonious balance. It appears that for Jung, the ideal of normality can be regarded as equivalent to optimal development – a situation that is seldom attained since most psyches in one way or another develop lopsidedly.

Self-evaluation question

- How does Jung's view of psychopathology differ from Freud's view of psychopathology?

4.9 Implications and applications

4.9.1 Measurement and research

Did Jung adhere to a highly scientific approach in the development of his theory?

Jung's theory, like those of many depth psychologists, is partly based on his clinical work and his observations of his patients' behaviour. However, it also incorporates insights gained from his extensive research, which ranged from studies of reaction time to the analysis of dreams, from anatomical research to research into astrology, religion and mythology.

Jung believed that he had scientifically accounted for his theoretical views not merely on the basis of purely subjective speculation, but also through verifying his views in referring to various other sources of information. However, behaviourists and positivistic psychologists regard his theory as extremely unscientific and speculative. His critics maintain that his research, based on diverse sources (for example, clinical data of patients, dreams, visions, myths, fairy tales, anthropological data, literature, art, religion, astrology and alchemy), lacks systematised quantitative results and that he does not provide adequate grounds for determining the validity and reliability of his views. Because he believed that understanding an individual's behaviour cannot be derived from a 'statistical average', Jung spoke out against any quantified research based on the statistical method. Jung (1958a:9) describes his view of it as follows:

The statistical method shows the facts in the light of the ideal average but does not give us a picture of their empirical reality. While reflecting an indisputable aspect of reality, it can falsify the actual truth in a most misleading way. This is particularly true of theories that are based on statistics. The distinctive thing about real facts, however, is their individuality ... the real picture consists of nothing but exceptions to the rule, and in consequence, absolute reality has predominantly the character of irregularity.

Jung also believed that the study of personality is not the prerogative of a single discipline. A complete understanding of the total person cannot be achieved through one perspective, but it should be gleaned from all possible sources.

What are the techniques applied by Jung to gather data about human functioning?

Jung used three techniques in particular when gathering data about human functioning, namely the *word-association test*, *dream analysis* and *active imagination*. His followers also developed personality inventories for the measurement of his typology.

The word-association test

KEY TERM

word-association test:
a method to expose an individual's complex

Jung was not the first person to use the **word-association test** but he refined its use. Initially he used it to demonstrate Freud's hypothesis that the unconscious functions as an autonomous process. Later he began to use it as an indicator of emotionally loaded complexes when he discovered that certain words and phrases elicited unusual responses from his subjects.

The test consists of a standard list of words read out by the researcher, to which the subject or patient must respond with the first word that comes to mind. The subject's reaction time is determined by a stopwatch. Because various physiological reactions accompany emotional excitation, Jung also measured physiological reactions. He measured the person's pulse rate (an apparatus for measuring change in the electric conduction of the skin caused by perspiration). Jung postulated that a word, which caused a delayed reaction time and/or a change in the pulse rate, breathing and skin conduction, could be interpreted as a sign of a complex. For this reason, he used the test as a shortcut method to expose his patients' complexes (Jung, 1960:93–95). The word-association test is still often used today as a method to determine whether or not a person is lying.

Enrichment

Robert Winer (2011) compiled a list of words, *Jung's Word Association Test Form*, which could be used to administer a word-association test, recording the subject's response time to the first word or idea that comes to mind. The amount of time the subject takes to respond and the response itself are then used to analyse the test results. This test can be downloaded for free from blog.hawaii.edu/dop/files/2011/08/jung-word-association.doc.

Dream analysis

Dreams, for Jung, as for Freud, are the path to the unconscious and an important means of gaining insight into a person's unconscious and irrational functioning. Jung (1964b:149) describes dreams as '... impartial, spontaneous products of the unconscious psyche, outside the control of the will ... they show us the unvarnished natural truth.' Dreams reveal, according to Jung (1964a:37), the archetypal contents of the psyche. He believes that the interpretation of dreams enriches people's conscious rational existence because in that way they are brought into contact with their collective unconscious and thus each individual 'again learns to understand the forgotten language of the instincts and archetypes'.

Dreams also fulfil an important compensatory function of maintaining the balance of the psyche. Jung (1964a:34) claims:

The general function of dreams is to try to restore our psychological balance by producing dream material that re-establishes, in a subtle way, the total psychic equilibrium.

It seems then that the one-sided development of the psyche can be deduced from dream contents as a function of the compensatory nature of dreams.

While Freud regarded dreams as wish-fulfilment and rooted in the past, and Adler saw dreams as revealing the future, Jung believed that both views were valid: dreams could expose the past, as well as predict the future.

In the *analysis of dreams*, Jung deviates from Freud's methods. Freud uses free association and usually analyses only one dream in detail. Jung believes that Freud's use of free association is not only limiting, but that it can lead to wrong interpretations. He also believes that using only one dream is not sufficient. Free association, as far as Jung is concerned, only provides access to complexes; it cannot really reach the content of dreams – the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

The content of dreams as reflectors of archetypes can possibly provide the opposite meaning of what is yielded through the content of the complexes. Jung prefers to work with a number of consecutive dreams rather than using Freud's method. Although he analyses each dream individually, he puts each within the context of a series of dreams. According to Jung, the symbolism and meaning of any dream gradually unfolds in the course of a series of dreams, and the accuracy of an interpretation can be verified only within the context of that series.

Jung contends that a true symbol (the content of a dream) is multifaceted and that various methods should be combined to discover its real meaning. Jung even delved into alchemy (primitive chemistry that sought to change base metals into gold) in his efforts to find the meaning of certain symbols. He discovered that some of the symbols that occur in dreams are exact replicas of symbols used by mediaeval alchemists, despite the fact that the dreamers themselves had no knowledge of alchemy. Jung regarded the correspondence between the contents of dreams and the symbols used by alchemists as sufficient proof of the existence of archetypes and of the notion that archetypes reveal themselves in dreams.

Self-evaluation question

- What are the differences/similarities between Freud's and Jung's views of dreams and dream analysis?

Activity

Rabbi Hisda once remarked that if you ignore a dream it is like leaving a letter unopened and unread (Van Rensburg, 2000:29). So as not to ignore the messages from your own psyche, you are advised to keep a dream-book, noting all your dreams as accurately as possible after you have dreamt them. Dreams seldom tell us something we know – most of the time they point to some 'blind spot' in our psyche. But Jung advised people not to try to analyse their dreams on their own, but rather to do so together with a 'dream-mate' (someone to whom the dream could be told). After you have assembled several dreams, you and the 'dream-mate' should look for 'themes' or 'patterns', which are revealed in several dreams, and not try to look at a single dream at a time, because only then will the 'great dreams' come to the fore. As Jung stated: 'Only when a dream is very impressive, or repeats itself often, do interpretation and conscious understanding become desirable.' (Van Rensburg, 2000:109).

Karin Kurtz and Paul Benedetto (2009) provide a framework for a better understanding of one's dreams. (http://www.jungiananalysts.com/wp/?page_id=37)

Active imagination

Apart from dreams, Jung also recognised the value of fantasy – **active imagination** – as a method of studying the collective unconscious, especially for the purpose of amplifying certain dream contents. According to Humbert (1984) the purpose of active imagination is to break through the defences of the conscious so that the unconscious can emerge. Although Jung (1959a:190) describes active imagination as '...part dream, part vision, or dream mixed with visions' – that is, a type of introspection that generates visual images – it should not be confused with hallucinations. When people engage in active imagination, they generate the visual images themselves, whereas people who hallucinate have no control over their hallucinations.

KEY TERM

active imagination: a method of studying the collective unconscious, especially for the purpose of amplifying the contents of certain dreams

The method of active imagination involves concentrating on a fleeting dream image or on any spontaneous visual image that emerges, and noting the changes the image undergoes. The image and its changes may be expressed in various ways, such as

through paintings, sculptures or simply through visualisation. In contrast with free association, where the focus shifts from one symbol to the next by association, active imagination entails concentrating on only one symbol through the technique of amplification, and making associations only in terms of that particular symbol. Humbert (1984) points out that active imagination differs from other techniques involving imagination in that there are no prescriptions with regard to the position of the body, the regulation of breathing or the use of relaxation techniques. According to her (Humbert, 1984:91) active imagination is:

... a question of meeting oneself where one's attention can be turned towards one's affects and phantasies, whilst the conscious mind remains what it is. The inability to produce active imagination is indicative of the state of defences.

Humbert warns that the use of active imagination is not without its dangers. If a person's defences have been broken down, this technique may allow a latent psychosis to emerge.

Inventories of personality types

The first questionnaire that was devised to measure Jung's personality types was the Gray-Wheelwright Inventory, which was soon replaced by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The latter, which consisted of 166 forced-choice items, was developed in 1920 by Kathrine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers (Briggs & Myers, 1943; 1976). The reliability and validity of this questionnaire have been established through many studies, and today the MBTI is the instrument of choice for identifying Jung's personality types. It is used particularly extensively in commerce, and for staff recruitment and selection.

Enrichment

Hans Eysenck developed two additional personality inventories specifically for measuring Jung's attitudes of the psyche (introversion and extraversion): the Maudsley Personality Inventory and the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck, 1947; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1963).

4.9.2 Psychotherapy

Why did Jung use psychotherapy, and what method/s did he apply?

Psychotherapy, for Jung, is the process through which patients are enabled to discover their own psyche so that it may be brought to full individuation in moving towards the attainment of self through counteracting one-sided development.

Therapy is not a one-way process, however, since it gives both patient and therapist insights into their own individual personality functioning via the analysis of the patient. For Jung (1961:131) psychotherapy is:

... a dialogue between the sick psyche and the psyche of the doctor, which is presumed to be 'normal'. It is a coming to terms with the sick personality and that of the therapist, both in principle equally subjective.

So Jung sets a condition for therapy, namely that the therapist should not only understand the patient but, first and foremost, himself or herself. It is essential that the therapist should personally have undergone analysis as a training ground for getting to know himself or herself. Jung (1961:154) describes this training analysis as follows:

In training analysis the doctor must learn his own psyche and take it seriously. If he cannot do that, the patient will not learn either. He will lose a portion of his psyche just as the doctor has lost that portion of his psyche which he has not learned to understand.

Acquiring psychotherapeutic skills is therefore not so much a matter of learning a technique as a confrontation with one's own psyche. Jung believes that the student who does not understand his or her own psyche will never be a successful therapist.

Jung (1961:156) also maintains that each therapist should have a 'father or mother confessor' to monitor his or her own psychic growth and development, to act as a 'third eye' in a therapeutic relationship. Since Jung believes that the therapist should be open to the patient and his or her problems, a situation could arise in which the patient's problem addresses a sensitive aspect in the life of the therapist. If this happens, the therapist would thus be a 'wounded' partner in the therapeutic relationship and, as such, the therapist would need a third perspective.

Jung (1961:152) does not believe in applying a specific therapeutic method, as he asserts that: 'Psychotherapy and analysis are as varied as are human individuals. I treat every patient as individually as possible, because the solution of the problems is always an individual one.' Over and above the type of therapeutic technique or method used in therapy, he outlines four important stages (Jung, 1954a:55) in the therapeutic process, namely *confession*, *enlightenment*, *education* and *transformation*.

- **Confession** is an essential first step in the healing process because it forces individuals to acknowledge their limitations towards other people and they thereby experience a catharsis and emotional cleansing by revealing the pathogenic secrets of their psyches. This cathartic experience leads to a bond of dependence – transference – with the therapist who prepares the way for the next stage of therapy, namely enlightenment.
- **Enlightenment** comes about through the therapist's interpretation of the unconscious material revealed by the patient, through which the patient begins to gain insight into the nature and origin of his or her problem. In other words, the one-sided development of his or her psyche and the nature and cause of the libido blocking is conveyed to the patient.
- In the third stage, **education**, the patient begins to incorporate into his or her personality the insights of the previous stages and begins adapting to the social environment.
- The final stage, **transformation**, is attained only by those few patients who have the necessary developmental potential. During this stage, which builds upon the three preceding stages, the issue is more than a simple adaptation on the part of the patient. It is specifically to assist the patient to attain the self, that is, the transcending of the psyche towards a self.

Self-evaluation question

- Describe Jung's therapeutic process and the way he envisages the role of the therapist.

4.9.3 Religion

Why did Jung consider religion to be an important aspect of human functioning?

Jung (1958a:24) not only acknowledges a broad religious instinct in people; he recognises the importance of religion for human existence in the particular sense of faith in and worship of a god. He expresses his view as follows:

Just as man, as a social being, cannot in the long run exist without a tie to the community, so the individual will never find real justification for his existence, and his own spiritual and moral autonomy, anywhere except in an extramundane principle capable of relativizing the overpowering influence of external factors. The individual who is not anchored in God can offer no resistance on his own resources to the physical and moral blandishments of the world.

Jung (1958b) maintains that belonging to a religious organisation or subscribing to a dogma or creed does not imply religion. The source of religion originates as an archetype in the collective unconscious as an original religious experience (god archetype), before it manifests itself in formalised religious practices.

After studying Eastern and Western religions, he came to the conclusion that there are archetypal differences embedded in the religious practices between Eastern and Western psyches. The Eastern psyche is introverted, seeking the meaning of existence within itself with the aim of transcending the self through a practice such as meditation. The Western psyche, on the other hand, is dominantly extraverted, seeking the meaning of existence outside the self in devotion to a god, 'External Power' or 'Wholly Other'. With these differences in mind, Jung concludes that each individual should find his or her own cultural way to religious expression. He also maintains that no one religion or god-figure is more valid than another because the origin of all religions can be traced back to a universal god-archetype (Jung, 1958b).

Jung's analytical approach to religion as a universally human phenomenon and his specific analysis of the Christian faith generated a considerable number of controversial ideas. For example, for Jung, Christ is a symbol of the self and God is not purely good, because he possesses the polar contrasts of good and evil. Despite the controversial nature of many of Jung's ideas on religion, many theologians regard them as an important contribution to the development of religious thinking (Ellenberger, 1970). In his evaluation of Jung's present day influence on psychology and religion, Wulff (1997) points to the fact that biblical scholars turn to Jung's psychology in reviving the traditional methods of textual analysis and as a major resource for personal spiritual growth. He also stresses the fact that 'among contemporary perspectives, Jung's approach seems to be exceptionally appealing to women' and the development of a feminist theology (Wulff, 1997:455).

4.9.4 The interpretation and handling of aggression

Did Jung's theory really bring any insights to the problem of aggression?

Jung never directly referred to aggression or violence in any of his works. However, we may infer from his theory that he would have regarded aggression as a function of the shadow, because the shadow represents primitive animal instincts, which are associated with impulsive desires and emotions. Although aggression is therefore an intrinsic part of human functioning, each individual's psychic functioning will determine whether it is expressed in constructive or destructive behaviour. Jung would ascribe destructive behaviour, such as the manifestation of aggression in violence, to a shadow that has been repressed or inadequately channelled. Similarly, the constructive channelling of aggression into creative activities of any nature will depend on the extent to which that person has managed to integrate his or her ego and shadow as opposing forces. The greater the synthesis between shadow and ego, the less likely it will be that the person will engage in explicit, uncontrolled aggression, and the more imperfect a person's individuation and transcendence, the greater the likelihood that aggression will be manifested overtly in destructive behaviour such as violence.

4.10 Evaluation of the theory

What contribution does Jung's theory make to the study of personality?

Jung's theoretical views have been singled out for particular criticism because of his so-called 'unscientific' approach to the study of personality. As he obtained his data from sources such as alchemy, religion, mysticism and occultism, in addition to self-analysis and observation of his patients, he has been criticised for the emphasis he places on the irrational in his thinking. Jung thought, however, that he was misunderstood in this respect. The fact that he involved fields such as mysticism and occultism in the study of the human psyche was not necessarily proof that he blindly believed everything about them. He felt obliged to study them in order to collect information on the collective unconscious and find proof for the existence of the archetypes. Furthermore, Jung believed that when the scientific method was inadequate for studying complicated psychic phenomena, one should reject the method rather than the subject – and that is exactly what he did. According to Jung, the human psyche can be studied only through human experience, and human experience cannot be encapsulated in a laboratory.

Some critics dismiss Jung's theories as unclear, incomprehensible and contradictory. Such criticism is often levelled by those who do not study Jung's work as a whole, and therefore do not understand the theory. Jung's work should preferably be studied in its totality and within its own framework, and should not be dealt with eclectically.

His views on the attainment of the self are criticised as being elitist because he says such development is destined only for the outstanding few. The counter argument is that this enhances the theory, however, because it broadens the spectrum of what it means to be human and therefore breaks with psychology's preoccupation with the statistically average person. Furthermore, his conception of the attainment of the self and his acceptance of teleological motivation paved the way for the theoretical views of Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Victor Frankl, in whose theories the self and teleological perspectives play a prominent role.

Van der Post (1976) points out, in his evaluation of Jung's theory, that Jung gave due credit to both masculinity and femininity through his archetypes of the animus and anima, in contrast with Freud, who equated being human with being male (through his concepts of penis envy and castration anxiety, which implied that women are actually 'less than' men). Van der Post (1976:161) states that Jung restored human femininity to its rightful place in an era in which there was a dearth of theories '... in which both masculine and feminine values, both the man and the woman, have been honoured in their full proportions and each allowed their unimpeded role in life'. According to Van der Post (1976:68), Jung's main contribution to contemporary humanity lies in '... the rediscovery of the great feminine objective within the objective psyche of man, as to make possible as never before a reconciliation of the masculine and feminine elements in life'.

Jung's theory had a marked influence on areas beyond the borders of psychology, especially literature and art. However, with the exception of the word-association test and the concepts of introversion and extraversion, Jung's work has not stimulated much empirical research. Recently, however, there has been a revival of interest in Jung's views stimulated by two separate sources. Firstly, psychologists are looking at his theory with renewed interest as a result of their disillusionment with excessively positivist approaches, which have brought psychology, and especially personology, to a sterile cul-de-sac. The unorthodox methods for which Jung had been criticised seem no longer to be so 'unscientific' since they provide access to the unobservable and non-quantifiable facets of what it is to be human. Secondly, Jung's views are experiencing a 'renaissance' among the lay public in their search for meaning since his encyclopaedic views about humanity are among the few that allow for the spiritual dimension of humanity and its religious struggles.

Enrichment

There are worldwide institutes and associations based on and promoting the theories of Jung.

International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP)

Founded in 1955 by a group of psychoanalysts to sustain and promote Jung's work. (www.jung.org)

(continued)

Southern African Association of Jungian Analysts (SAAJA)

This association, based in Cape Town, is affiliated to IAAP and provides postgraduate training in Jungian analysis. (www.jungsouthernafrica.co.za)

The Centre for Applied Jungian Studies

Based in Johannesburg, the centre provides courses and workshops, as well as online programmes on the teachings of Jung. (appliedjung.com)

The following groups, dedicated to the work of Jung, can also be found on social media such as Facebook:

- **The Jungian Book Club** This is an internet club with 1 235 members who read and discuss books on Jung and works that are related to his theories.
- **Carl Jung Depth Psychology** This group, with 48 885 members, is dedicated to the work of Jung, but it is not a ‘chat room’ open for discussion.
- **Carl Jung Discussion Group** This group, with 7 249 members, is designed for discussions about the life and work of Jung.

Self-evaluation question

- What are the similarities between Jung’s view of a person and the views reflected in the Eastern and African perspectives?

4.11 Suggested reading

Clarke, JJ (1992). *In search of Jung. Historical and philosophical enquiries*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Huskinson, L (2008). *Dreaming the myth onwards: New directions in Jungian Therapy and Thought*.

Jung, CG (1960). *The structure and dynamics of the psyche. Collected works (Vol. 8)*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

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Samuels, A (1985). *Jung and the post-Jungians*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Shamdasani, S (2003). *Jung and the making of Modern Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shamdasani, S (2012). *CG Jung: A Biography in Books*. London: WW Norton.

Sharp, D (1991). *Jung Lexicon: A Primer of Terms and Concepts*. Toronto: Inner City Books.

Smith, CD (1990). *Jung’s Quest for Wholeness: A religious and historical perspective*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Storr, A (1983). *The essential Jung*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Van Rensburg, C (2000). *Jou drome: die onbewuste het al die antwoorde*. Kaapstad: JL van Schaik.

Van Rensburg, C (2001). *Your dreams: the unconscious has all the answers*. Cape Town: JL van Schaik.



Chapter 5

The individual psychology of Alfred Adler (1870–1937)

Henning Viljoen & Werner Meyer

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5.1 Outcomes

- Understand why Adler's theory is known as **Individual Psychology** and why it could be seen as a depth psychological approach as well as a person-oriented approach.
- Understand why Adler's view of the person can be described as **holistic, teleologic** and **person-orientated**.
- Explain Adler's idea of a lifestyle and how a person is motivated to **strive for superiority** and **compensate for feelings of inferiority** in developing an individual lifestyle.
- Grasp how the individual's development is influenced by **weaknesses** (be it real or psychological) and social factors such as **birth order**.
- Understand how Adler views **optimal development** and **pathologic behaviour**.
- Able to contemplate the implications of Adler's theory for **psychotherapy**, dream **analysis** and **aggression**.
- Able to **critically evaluate** Adler's theory.



Alfred Adler
Source: Public domain:
Alfred_Adler (1870–1937)

5.2 Background

Alfred Adler (1870–1937) was born in Vienna as the second child of six children. Like Freud, he spent most of his life in Vienna, where he went to school and received his university training as a physician and psychiatrist at the same university as Freud. Adler and Freud were both Jewish, but Freud grew up in a Jewish ghetto, which made him aware of his minority status throughout his life. Adler, however, knew only a few Jewish children and, as such, he was more aware of the Viennese culture than being a Jew; in fact, as an adult he converted from Judaism to Christianity. Despite certain similarities in their background and their initial mutual interest in Freud's newly developing psychoanalysis, Adler soon developed his own theory of *individual psychology*. In his new approach, Adler stressed the uniqueness of the individual's behaviour which, for him, is shaped by interaction with the social environment, rather than ascribing behaviour to unconscious universal biological drives whose satisfaction is in a consistent conflict with the norms of society.

How did Adler's childhood influence his theory?

Adler had a difficult childhood, marked by sickness and jealousy towards his older brother. He had a weak constitution and suffered various illnesses such as pneumonia and rickets (which weakens the skeleton). As a result, he could not enjoy games and physical activities in the way children of his own age could, and this naturally distressed him (Bottome, 1957). Being an extremely sick child during the first two years of his life, he was spoiled and pampered by his mother, only to be rejected by her after the birth of another brother. His relations with his parents were thus quite different from Freud's. In contrast to Freud, Adler was much closer to his father than to his mother. It is therefore understandable that he could not accept Freud's Oedipus complex because it was so foreign to his own childhood experience (Schultz & Schultz, 2005:125).

KEY TERM

compensation: an attempt by the individual to make up for a weakness (the weakness being fictitious or real)

Adler could not compete with his older brother, Sigmund, who engaged in all sorts of physical activities and games in which he could not take part. He compensated for these feelings of inferiority, which he experienced not only in relation to his brother but also to other children, by working hard at school. It seems likely, too, that these childhood influences were the reason why he later pursued an academic career and they might also have served as an impetus when he developed his theory, in which *feelings of inferiority* and **compensation** are central concepts (Aiken, 1993; Liebert & Spiegler, 1996).

Schultz and Schultz (2005:126) remark that in many ways, Adler's childhood experience reads like a textbook example 'of his later theory of overcoming childhood weaknesses and inferiorities and shaping one's destiny instead of being shaped by it'.

These personal experiences of Adler could serve as verification for his views that individual growth and development results from the attempt to compensate for one's inferiorities.

What was the nature of the relationship between Adler and Freud?

Adler was an active member of the *Viennese Psychoanalytic Society* from 1902 to 1911, and he served as president in 1910. Initially he and Freud met once a week to discuss psychoanalysis. Although they worked closely together, they never had an intimate friendship. According to Schultz and Schultz (2005), it is important to note that Adler was never a student or a disciple of Freud's nor was he ever psychoanalysed by him. Apparently, Adler also found it difficult to probe the unconscious and to psychoanalyse people. It is therefore understandable why Adler stressed the role of consciousness and minimised the role of the unconscious in his own theory. Because of ever increasing differences of opinion between Freud and Adler, Adler founded his own society, the *Society for Individual Psychology*, in 1912.

After serving in the Austrian army during World War I, Adler started to organise child-guidance clinics for the government in Vienna. Apart from applying his own theoretical concepts, he also introduced group training methods, which became the forerunner of modern group therapy. He first visited the United States in 1926, after which he became a regular visitor, spending most of his time abroad. He died in Scotland in 1937 during a strenuous lecturing tour, after suffering a heart attack (Schultz & Schultz, 2005).

Why did Adler call his approach 'Individual Psychology'?

It is not clear why he chose the name *Individual Psychology*. His intention was probably to emphasise his belief, in contrast to Freud, that individuals themselves have the ability to decide on their own life goals and organise their lives accordingly.

Psychology should therefore focus on the study of the individual rather than on establishing the general laws that govern human behaviour. Another possible reason for choosing this name is that he simply wanted to move away from the name ‘psychoanalysis’, which carries the connotation that human behaviour is blindly determined by unconscious factors in the psyche. Feist and Feist (1998) believe that Adler chose the name ‘Individual Psychology’ to emphasise the uniqueness of each person and the holistic nature of human functioning.

Is there only one way to understand Adler’s theory and does his theory, strictly speaking, belong to depth psychology?

Adler’s initial conception of human behaviour was strongly influenced by his medical background and Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis. He then gradually began to formulate an independent viewpoint, which made minimal use of physiological explanations, and which differed markedly from Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. You will come across a number of different interpretations of Adler’s theory in the literature, and it is therefore important to understand that three phases can be distinguished in the historical development of his theory (Maddi, 1989:115).

At first, Adler did not deviate from Freud’s psychoanalytical framework; he even expanded on the theory. However, Adler’s view gradually became more human-oriented, mainly because he did not agree with Freud that humans are motivated basically by their sexual drive. During the second phase, he put forward the view that what motivates humans is ‘striving for power’ to overcome ‘feelings of inferiority’. He saw this as the driving force behind all human behaviour. During the third phase, Adler moved totally away from the psychoanalytical framework with a new theory that aligned more closely with a person-oriented framework. This theory places greater importance on psychological factors and the fact that a person is free to make choices, rather than the deterministic view that human behaviour is determined by biological and other deterministic factors. Adler believed that this pursuit to become a complete human being, which he called the *quest for superiority or perfection*, is what drives human behaviour (Maddi, 1989).

Although some of Adler’s final perspectives belong in the person-oriented rather than the depth psychology camp, his theory will nevertheless be presented here as a depth psychology theory. Firstly, because of his historical connection with Freud and because his theory, even as finally formulated, continues to show a number of characteristics peculiar to depth psychology. Among them are the attention he pays to unconscious memories and motives and his emphasis on the influence of early childhood experiences on later development.

A second reason for placing Adler in the field of depth psychology is one of a more didactic nature. The very fact that his theory is in many respects the antithesis of Freud’s (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956), means that the study of the one contributes to a better understanding of the other.

Enrichment

Maslow (1962) and Ansbacher (1962) speculate, in two articles, about the question of whether Adler was a disciple of Freud. After assembling evidence pertaining to the association of Adler and Freud, Ansbacher comes to the conclusion that while Adler was a keen student critic and co-worker of Freud, he never was a disciple as the term generally implies. The notion of Adler's discipleship was established by Freud and became widespread throughout literature, despite efforts to dispel it. Ansbacher hopes that this notion will be replaced by a more factual account.

Self-evaluation question

- Point out the similarities and differences between Adler's and Freud's childhood experiences and how this influenced their theoretical thinking.

5.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

Why can Adler's view underlying his theory be described as holistic, teleological and person-oriented?

Adler's view of the person is *holistic*; in other words, he believes that the individual functions as a whole and that a proper understanding of personality can never be achieved by studying components of personality separately. In this respect, Adler was strongly influenced by the *Ganzheit* and Gestalt approaches in German psychology, and by the former South African prime minister, Jan Smuts, who created the term 'holism' (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1970:335; Corsini & Marsella, 1983; Dreikurs, 1963:6, 239; Smuts, 1961).

One of the implications of Adler's holistic view of the person is that, unlike Freud, he does not draw clear distinctions between structural, dynamic and developmental concepts. Most of his concepts are best regarded as attempts to describe human functioning as a whole. While this has the advantage that his view of the person is economical in the sense that he uses relatively few concepts and assumptions to explain behaviour, it does sometimes make it difficult to understand each concept on its own.

Compared to Freud's deterministic view, Adler adheres more to a *teleological* vantage point in explaining human behaviour, because he sees the person's functioning as striving towards a goal in a *purposeful way*. The striving for superiority is the overriding goal of all human functioning. This striving is expressed in two ways, for example to serve the individual as a **striving for power** or to serve society as a striving for the well-being of society or **social interest**. Furthermore, each person works out this central goal in his or her own way and strives towards that goal by his or her own methods. Thus each person to a certain extent determines his or her own **lifestyle**.

KEY TERMS

striving for power: a basic human motive to compensate for weaknesses

social interest: an innate desire to serve the community

lifestyle: the way in which a person strives for superiority in choosing his or her own goals and establishing his or her own methods to achieve them

KEY TERM**fictional finalism:**

individuals' creation of fictitious goals, which direct their behaviour as reflected in their own unique lifestyles

This teleological position, in other words, the idea that behaviour is goal-directed, is formalised by Adler in his idea of **fictional finalism**. According to this principle, the individual's goals are fictions; they do not 'really' exist because they are created by the individual. However, they do determine behaviour in the sense that the individual's behaviour is directed towards achieving these goals. Theoretically, therefore, people can set themselves any goals – such as becoming the president of a country or discovering how to fly an aircraft using solar energy – and these goals will have a major influence on their lives, even if they are unrealistic or unattainable. The principle of fictional finalism thus implies that human beings have considerable freedom in determining their own destinies.

Adler's ideas about goal-directedness were strongly influenced by the philosophy of Hans Vaihinger (1924), whose teaching is known as the philosophy of 'as if'. Vaihinger expounded the view that people's total lives are determined by their fictions or, stated differently, that people live their lives believing that some fictional ideas are real. For example, an individual creates the ideal of an absolutely democratic political system and strives for this ideal as if it existed or could exist in reality. Vaihinger thought that the concepts of God, heaven and hell were examples of such fictions. He pointed out, however, that in spite of their fictional character, these ideals enabled people to lift themselves up by their own bootstraps and ethically live better lives than would have been possible without such ideals.

A further basic idea embedded in Adler's view of the goal-directedness of behaviour is that the individual is naturally geared towards attaining superiority or perfection, although each individual creates his or her own specific goals. Adler (1930:398) expresses it as follows:

I began to see clearly in every psychological phenomenon the striving for superiority. It runs parallel to physical growth and is an intrinsic necessity of life itself. It lies at the root of all solutions to life's problems and is manifested in the way in which we meet these problems. All our functions follow its direction. They strive for conquest, security, increase, either in the right or the wrong direction. The impetus from minus to plus never ends. The urge from below to above never ceases. Whatever premises all our philosophers and psychologists dream of – self-preservation, pleasure principle, equalization – all these are but vague representations, attempts to express the great upward drive.

This striving for superiority should not be confused with the actualising tendency, which Rogers regards as the basis of human functioning. Rogers saw the actualising tendency as becoming who you are, or the individual's striving to fulfil his or her genetically determined potential. Adler viewed an individual as becoming other than who he or she is by overcoming real or imagined inferiorities. The striving towards superiority is a tendency to compensate for one's own weakness; to become more than one's potential determines. Adler seems to have an idealist version of development while Rogers has an actualisation version (Wagner, 2015).

Because Adler views the person as 'master of his own destiny' in determining his or her own lifestyle according to his or her own 'fictitious goals', his position is closer to the views of the *person-oriented approaches* than the deterministic and mechanistic

positions of psychoanalysis and behaviourism. Although Adler acknowledges constitutional and environmental factors, he sees these factors as being subordinate to individuals' goal-directedness and their creative abilities to identify their own goals. Adler's approach may therefore be described as teleological and person-oriented.

Self-evaluation questions

- According to Adler's view of the person, would you classify his theory as a depth psychological approach or a person-oriented approach? Motivate your answer.
- Explain how Adler's theory makes provision for goal-directedness in human behaviour.

5.4 The structure of the personality

Does Adler make use of structural concepts to explain behaviour?

KEY TERM

creative self: the individual's ability to be creative in forming his or her own life goals and in planning how to achieve these goals

Adler does not use structural concepts in his explanation of human functioning, and specifically ignores the Freudian structural concepts of id, ego and superego. Adler sees the personality simply as a whole that functions to achieve self-determined goals, and does not distinguish between specific components of personality. All that can therefore be said of Adler's conception of the structure of personality is that the individual has certain *constitutional attributes* and a **creative self**. These two, in interaction with the *social environment*, determine how individuals will develop and the goals they will strive for (in other words, their *lifestyles*).

5.4.1 Constitutional attributes

Adler provides no detailed discussion of exactly what he means by constitutional attributes. According to him, each individual is born with a set of genetically determined attributes, but they are not decisive in determining the direction and nature of the individual's development. The constitutional attributes are merely a potential which, in interaction with environmental factors and the creative self, play a role in human development.

The most important aspects of people's constitutions are the physical or organic weaknesses they are born with or which they acquire (for example through illness or accident). Individuals compensate for this perceived inferiority in that the creative self enables each individual to create his or her own ways of compensating. Note, however, that for Adler there is no hard and fast rule according to which individuals respond to their weaknesses and feelings of inferiority.

5.4.2 Social environment

Adler believes that a general *feeling of inferiority* develops because of a child's first social interaction. This feeling of inferiority is ever present throughout life; it starts from the beginning when an infant is small and totally dependent upon

adults for survival. The infant develops feelings of inferiority, comparing his or her dependency and smallness to the strength and largeness of the parents in the social environment. Adler (1938:96) believes ‘to be a human being means to feel oneself inferior’.

These feelings of inferiority are not genetically determined – it is rather a function of the infant’s small constitution in interaction with the social environment. This interaction is characterised by the infant’s inferior feelings of helplessness and dependency on the parents as grownups. According to Adler, all growth and development result from the individual’s attempts to compensate for these *feelings of inferiority* and to *strive for superiority*. (The feeling of inferiority and striving for superiority will be discussed in more detail under ‘The dynamics of the personality’.)

5.4.3 The creative self

Little specific information can be given about the creative self either. Adler simply wants to emphasise that human beings have the ability to be creative in forming their own life goals and in planning how to achieve them. One should not, however, view the creative self as a structural part of the personality, but rather as a capability of the whole person. Adler stresses that individuals are not at the mercy of circumstances, and that they have the ability to interpret their circumstances and potential and use them in a creative way. He does not, therefore, see a person’s constitution and social circumstances as limiting the individual’s development in a definitive or deterministic way.

The individual’s ability to formulate life goals and the methods to achieve them are part of the creative self. Goals and means, however, are not an automatic outcome of constitutional and environmental factors. Individuals create their own goals and methods, an ability that makes human behaviour unpredictable in principle, unless one has a thorough knowledge of the person’s self-chosen goals and the means he or she uses to achieve them (in other words, the person’s lifestyle).

5.4.4 The lifestyle

What is a ‘lifestyle’, according to Adler, and how many does he distinguish?

Although it is the basic tendency of all human beings to compensate for feelings of inferiority and to strive for superiority, each person establishes his or her own specific goals in life and uses his or her own methods to reach them. Adler calls this the individual’s *lifestyle*. One person seeks superiority by being a good athlete, another strives for political power, and a third wants popularity. In addition, each person pursues goals in his or her own style. To attain political power, for example, people may work hard, make use of the influence of friends or be disparaging of their opponents – there are many alternatives. The creative self is extremely inventive!

Although Adler maintains that people all develop their own, unique styles, he distinguishes between four characteristic types of lifestyle, namely the *active-constructive*, the *passive-constructive*, the *active-destructive* and the *passive-destructive* lifestyles (Dreikurs, 1963; Maddi, 1989).

- **The active-constructive type:** This type of lifestyle usually develops in a family atmosphere where the predominant spirit is one of co-operation, trust and respect. It is marked by optimism and a positive, supportive, community-oriented approach to problem-solving. People with this kind of lifestyle tend to set goals that serve the community, and are often ambitious and active in their striving towards successful achievement of their goals. Because of this, they are often community leaders.
- **The passive-constructive type:** People with this kind of lifestyle are also inclined to adopt community-oriented goals, but prefer to pursue them in a passive way by relying on other people to take the initiative. Such people are therefore likely to be friendly and charming, but somewhat lacking in independence and enterprise.
- **The active-destructive type:** People with this lifestyle have a propensity for goals that are more selfish and that could disadvantage society. They work actively towards fulfilling their goals and are often power-seeking individuals who might even exhibit antisocial behaviour.
- **The passive-destructive type:** Someone with this kind of lifestyle is as likely to be antisocial, but tends to be lazy and passively aggressive. Such a person also strives towards selfish or antisocial goals, but in a relatively passive way.

Self-evaluation question

- Try to distinguish clearly between Adler's four typical lifestyles by speculating how individuals who adopted one of the lifestyles might cope with the same organ inferiority. Take as an example the loss of the right arm in early childhood as a result of an accident. Now test yourself and see if you more or less speculated along the same lines.
- Someone with an *active-constructive lifestyle* would be able to compensate for this handicap in a positive way, perhaps by learning to be as competent with one hand as other people are with two. The person might even try to be of service to humanity by specialising in the manufacture of artificial limbs for physically handicapped people.
- Someone with a *passive-constructive lifestyle* might concentrate on learning how to move, eat and dress gracefully in spite of the handicap in order to attract other people's admiration.
- Someone with an *active-destructive lifestyle* might well try to take revenge on society by making other people feel guilty because they are not handicapped, or by belittling them for being less competent than he or she is, despite the handicap.
- Someone with a *passive-destructive lifestyle* could attack society in a passive-aggressive way by consciously resisting learning to cope with only one hand, and by stubbornly refusing to accept help.

Activity

Try to determine your own 'lifestyle'. Now take people you know well and see if you can determine according to which 'lifestyle' they operate.

5.5 The dynamics of the personality

What motivates a person, according to Adler?

It is difficult to draw a clear distinction between Adler's view of the dynamics of personality and developmental principles, because the experience of inferiority and the striving for perfection are both motivational, as well as developmental concepts.

KEY TERM

striving for superiority:

the overriding goal of all human functioning, expressed in a striving to serve the individual as 'striving for power' and to serve society as 'social interest'

Adler regards the **striving for superiority** or perfection as the overall motivation of the person. This striving manifests itself in two ways, namely as a *striving for power* and as *social interest* (Adler, 1930; Adler, 1938; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1970). In addition, it is important to grasp that this striving, whatever form it takes, is activated by the *experience of inferiority* and leads to an attempt to overcome the inferiority by means of *compensation*.

Adler defines the striving for superiority as a striving to move from the bottom to the top or to change a minus into a plus, and that is why he sometimes calls it the striving for perfection (Adler, 1930:398). He believes that life is not possible without this upward pressure.

5.5.1 The striving for superiority: The striving for power

According to Adler, human striving – expressed as striving for power or as social interest – is activated by feelings of inferiority. For the human species, these feelings are focused upon the physical weakness of humans in comparison with animals. In the case of the individual person, the baby feels inferior to its parents and other adults because they are bigger, stronger and more skilful in every respect. Furthermore, people have unique constellations of characteristics, based on their constitutions and environmental circumstances. They can, depending on how they interpret these characteristics and their social situation, develop feelings of inferiority about some of their characteristics. Activated by the striving for power, they try to compensate for these feelings of inferiority.

Weaknesses in particular organs can be caused by genetic factors or environmental influences, such as accidents or illness. A constitutional weakness can make some bodily organs vulnerable to disease because the organs are a weak link in the body (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956:24). However, Adler regards the psychological influences of organ weakness as being more important than the physical ones. In this context there is little difference between real and imagined organ inferiorities. Both have a considerable influence on the person's development because it is, in any event, the *perception* of inferiority that activates the striving for superiority and gives it direction, regardless of the validity or otherwise of the perception.

People therefore strive to overcome and compensate for their specific forms of inferiority, changing their specific ‘minus’, as they experience it, into a particular ‘plus’, which they have chosen or created. The precise nature of the influence of organ weakness thus depends on the person’s perception of and reaction to the weakness or to his or her lifestyle.

How do people cope with their weaknesses and feelings of inferiority?

According to Adler, three typical responses to the experience of weakness can be distinguished, namely: *compensation*, *sensitivity* and *overcompensation*. While compensation is a healthy reaction to feelings of inferiority, the other reactions mentioned are less healthy, even neurotic.

Compensation is an attempt by the individual to make up for a weakness by developing the weak organ or function, or a related organ or function, to an extraordinarily high degree. A minus situation is thus converted into a plus situation as a direct expression of the striving for superiority. We all know people who have compensated for weaknesses in this way. A well-known example is Helen Keller who was deaf and blind but became a famous social worker, lecturer and academic. Another example is Stephen Hawking who contracted motor neurone disease and was given two years to live. Yet he went to Cambridge University and later became Professor of Mathematics and is regarded as one of the most brilliant theoretical physicists since Einstein.



Achievement in sport as compensation for weakness
Source: Fotolia: 918231



Stephen Hawking
Source: Alamy Stock Photo: D4PN84

Sensitivity refers to people’s preoccupations with their weaknesses, to the extent that they are easily hurt if any reference is made to them. For example, a person may be so sensitive about having a low resistance to illness that any enquiry about his or her health, or any comment, which implies that he or she does not look well, is felt to be belittling or insulting. Smokers who experience their smoking habit as a weakness often display this kind of sensitivity.

Overcompensation is an overemphasis of strong points (which themselves may result from compensation for weaknesses) in an attempt to hide weaknesses. For example, people who see their tendency towards untidiness as a weakness and feel inferior because of this, might compensate by becoming so tidy that they are a nuisance to themselves and to others. (Overcompensation is similar to the Freudian notion of reaction formation).

5.5.2 The striving for superiority: Social interest

As a species, humans are weak compared to other species (particularly animals of prey against whom they had to compete in prehistoric times). They experience their weakness as a ‘minus’ and will therefore often set themselves the goal of power as a ‘plus’ (and in this way develop a striving for superiority). As a species, human beings try to compensate for their weakness by developing intellectual abilities, technology, culture, and – something that Adler especially stresses – a strong *social structure*. The strength and protection which the group provides enables humankind to compensate for the weakness of its members. The striving for superiority therefore leads to the formation of groups and the development of culture, as well as to the development of *social interest*. Through group formation and communion with other people, the individual is able to change his or her ‘minus’ into a ‘plus’ extremely effectively. Not only does group life give humans more power than any other animal, it also makes them capable of developing a sublime and rich cultural life.

The striving to form groups should not be interpreted as simply a quest to establish separate ethnic or other groups, which might lead to inter-group conflict. This type of group formation would not further the goal of superiority, because it could worsen humankind’s position of weakness in relation to other species rather than strengthen it. For Adler, the ultimate and highest form of group formation includes all of humanity, instead of only those people who are racially, ethnically or culturally similar. It is a striving to achieve unity with all people of all times – those who have lived in the past and those who will exist in future – not only one’s immediate contemporaries. This is what Adler means by the term ‘social interest’.

Definition

Adler defines social interest as an innate desire to serve the community and as a striving for community with the whole of humankind, not just with the people in the immediate environment (Adler, cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1970:41).

Social interest includes an interest in other people and the ability to experience events from the viewpoint of another: ‘To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another’ (Adler, cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1970:421). Such expression of the striving for superiority is the zenith of human development in Adler’s view. (See Adler’s view of optimal development.)

While social interest is an inborn potential, it must nevertheless be developed consciously by the individual (Adler, cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956:134). Parents exert a powerful influence on its development because they are the first people with whom a child identifies, in the sense that the child wants to experience the world through the eyes, ears and hearts of the parents (Adler, cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1970:41).

The striving for superiority, which does not lead to the development of social interest, manifests itself in the development of an *inferiority complex* or a *superiority complex*.

Definitions

An **inferiority complex** is a lack of self-worth, doubt and uncertainty, and feelings of not measuring up to standards. It is often subconscious, and is thought to drive afflicted individuals to overcompensate, resulting either in spectacular achievement or extreme asocial behaviour. It develops through a combination of personality characteristics and personal experiences. (Inferiority complex – Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inferiority_complex)

A **superiority complex** is a psychological *defence mechanism* in which a person's feelings of superiority counter or conceal his or her feelings of inferiority. (Superiority complex – Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superiority_complex)

An inferiority complex is an acute feeling of inferiority characterised by extreme shyness or aggressiveness as compensation for these feelings. While normal feelings of inferiority can motivate a striving towards superiority, the inferiority complex paralyses a person, in displaying a low self-esteem and an attempt to prevent failure through avoidance. A superiority complex as an exaggerated feeling of being superior to others is usually a cover-up for an inferiority complex. 'They are different sides of the same coin', because a person with a superiority complex has hidden doubts about his or her abilities and lacks feelings of worth and self-assurance (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956:259, Durbin, 2008).

Self-evaluation questions

- Explain Adler's ideas of striving for superiority and compensation as agents of motivation in human functioning.
- How do you think Adler's view on social interest could be used to enable a society characterised by inter-group tension and animosity to function more harmoniously?

5.6 The development of the personality

In the context of Adler's theory, the development of personality concerns the question of how the individual's particular lifestyle develops.

5.6.1 The development of a lifestyle

How and when does the individual develop a particular lifestyle?

Although Adler does not distinguish between formal stages of development, it is clear that he regards the first five years as being of cardinal importance (Corsini & Marsella, 1983:96; Rychlak, 1981:145). In the first five years the prototype of the individual's lifestyle is formed, and this plays a determining role in the individual's development for the rest of his or her life, and cannot easily be changed.

Adler believes that adolescence, maturity and old age (which other psychologists often regard as marking the onset of major personality changes), are simply new situations in which existing traits, which have already developed as the basic lifestyle, are expressed and tested (Rychlak, 1981:149). These phases might create the opportunity for change when individuals perceive that, for some reason, their lifestyles are not functional.

Example

A young adult might discover that the life goal she had set herself as an adolescent (for example to become a good athlete) and the means she had devised to achieve this goal (like training frequently) do not agree with her adult status. As an adult she can now decide to change both her goal and her method of achievement (for instance, she might now strive to work in the service of health generally by becoming a physiotherapist and by living a healthy life herself).

Rather than demarcating developmental stages, Adler emphasises certain problems confronting the individual at specific age levels. He believes that problems can all be grouped into three categories, namely occupational, social and sexual (Rychlak, 1981:145).

Enrichment

Stein (1997) gives a simplified graphic illustration – *The Style of Life Tree* – and discussion of Adler's model of personality development. The roots of the tree represent the formative early childhood influences (i.e. health and appearance; social and economic position of the family; parental attitudes; family constellation and gender role). These influences impact on the person's style of life, which determines the individual's attitudes towards life tasks (i.e. attitudes toward the self, attitudes toward others, attitudes toward difficulties, attitudes toward other sex and attitudes toward life). These attitudes towards life tasks play a significant role in the handling of problems confronting the individual at specific age levels, namely occupational, social (other people) and love and sex.

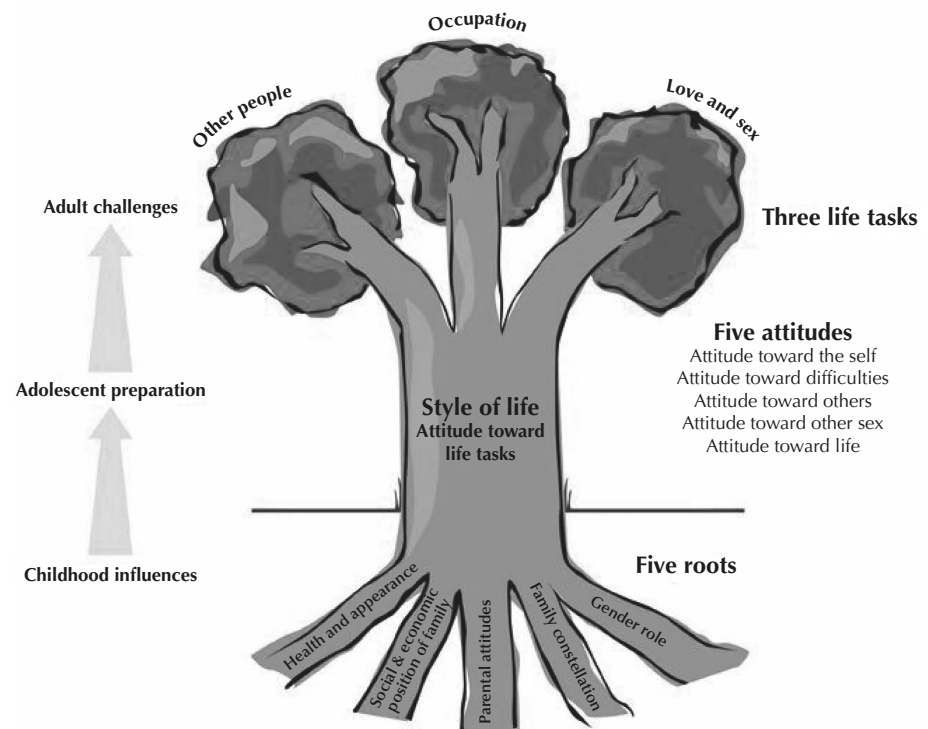


Figure 5.1 Style of life tree – Alfred Adler
Source: Adler Institute

5.6.2 Factors influencing development

Does Adler acknowledge any developmental factors?

Adler acknowledges the influence of *constitutional* and *environmental factors* in the development of the individual, but he regards the individual's creative reaction to these influences (as represented in the *creative self*) as the most important determining factor (Dreikurs, 1963:246).

Constitutional factors and the creative self

As a physician, Adler was naturally completely aware of the influence of *constitutional factors*, but he regards these inherited physical characteristics and abilities as being secondary to the way in which individuals use their abilities and weaknesses. What is important to him is what the person does with these inherited characteristics and abilities in shaping a unique individual lifestyle (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956).

Adler thus acknowledges the influence of constitutional factors such as organ inferiorities and other weaknesses on development, but not in a deterministic sense, because individuals possess the creative abilities to invent their own manner of compensation in determining their own development to a great extent.

The social environment and the creative self

With regard to the influence of the social environment and development, Adler holds the same non-deterministic viewpoint. According to him, the social environment may elicit a certain response to a situation, but this response is not determined by the experience itself, but what a person makes of that experience and the meaning he or she attaches to that experience (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Against the background of this non-deterministic stance, Adler regards the growing child's entire social environment as an important influence on his or her development. He pays special attention to the *family constellation*, in other words, the relationships between family members and, more specifically, the relative status of individual members within the family (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956:376; Maddi, 1989:348). He focuses particularly on the influence of *birth order* (in other words, whether a child is the eldest, second eldest, youngest, etcetera, in the family) on the development of children.

What is the influence of birth order on individual development according to Adler?

Adler holds that there are certain roles and behaviour patterns associated with birth order position which give rise to typical personality traits in all children who occupy a particular position in the family. Even though siblings have the same parents and live in the same house, they do not have the same social environment

because of their birth order in the family constellation. Adler focused on three positions: *first-born*, *second-born* and *youngest*.

- The **first-born child** usually receives a great deal of attention and lives a happy and secure existence until the second child is born. Eldest children tend to experience the sudden change in their position that occurs with the birth of a second child and the decreased attention they receive as a shock and ‘dethronement’. They often develop a grudge against the parents and the new sibling. The undivided love and attention must now be shared and no one can expect the eldest to suffer such a drastic loss and displacement without putting up a fight. The older a first-born is when the next child appears, the less sense of dethronement he or she experiences. For example, a nine-year-old will be less bothered by the birth of a sibling than a two-year-old. According to Adler, these experiences have certain influences on the adult personality. He found that first-borns are often oriented toward the past, nostalgic about past experiences and pessimistic about the future. They take a keen interest in the maintenance of order and authority. As adults they are conscientious, meticulous about detail, perfectionists and reflect conservative and authoritarian attitudes. Adler found that perverts, criminals and neurotics are often first-borns.
- The **second-born child**, however, has to compete with the eldest from the beginning. This acts as a strong stimulus to his or her striving for superiority, often manifesting itself as a striving for power. This is why second eldest children often have a strong need for achievement. Because the second child is born in an atmosphere of competition he or she will also never experience the shock of ‘dethronement’ like the eldest child. The family atmosphere also changes for the second child, because the arrival of a baby in the family has lost its novelty and the parents may also be less concerned and anxious about rearing the child. Adler found that the second child is optimistic about the future, highly competitive, ambitious and usually an achiever. However, a problem may arise if the second-born feels that he or she is fighting a losing battle and may never surpass the older one, so he or she gives up trying. Then none of the above-mentioned characteristics become part of the second-born’s lifestyle, and he or she remains an underachiever. Incidentally, Adler identified himself as a second child with the characteristics of the second-born child. He was highly competitive and ambitious and always regarded his elder brother as his rival. However, even when he became a famous analyst, he still felt overshadowed by his brother, who was a wealthy businessman.
- The **youngest child** has the advantage of never having to experience the shock of ‘dethronement’ by a younger sibling. However, youngest children may be subjected to the negative influence of being spoilt and pampered by the whole family, with the result that they often retain their helplessness and are prevented from developing independence. Unaccustomed to striving and struggling because he or she is used to being cared for by others, the youngest child will find it difficult to cope with the problems and adjustments of adulthood. Youngest children are therefore inclined to develop a dependent personality or, in other words, a passive lifestyle.

Schultz and Schultz (2005) points to the fact that Adler did not lay down firm rules of development. A child, therefore, will not automatically acquire one and only one kind of character as a result of birth order. Adler merely suggests that a certain lifestyle develops as a function of a person's position within his or her family, and that the individual 'must always be studied in his or her relationship with others, for these early relationships are used by the creative self in constructing a style of life'. The latest research, however, on the relation between birth order and personality/lifestyles seems to be controversial and inconclusive. (The research findings on the relation between birth order and personality will be discussed under 'Measurement and research').



Adler believes that certain personality traits are determined by the child's birth order in the family
Source: Jaren Jai Wicklund, Shutterstock

The individual's creative contribution

It is now clear that Adler distinguishes between three developmental determinants, namely physiological factors, environmental factors and the free choice of the individual (Dreikurs, 1963:238; Maddi, 1989:348). In a critical discussion of the psychology of his time, Adler points out that the tendency of psychologists to dwell on the first two of these influences can blind them to the creative contribution of individuals to their own development (Adler, cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956:208). If they could not determine that some influence had been inherited, they would assess it as being an environmental influence, and vice versa, ignoring the individual's creative contribution (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956).

Activity

Take yourself and your siblings as subjects and see how birth order influenced your personalities according to Adler's views.

For example, if you are the only child, do you see any resemblance with your personality and the characteristics of an only child according to Adler? You obviously did not experience 'dethronement' or competition with rival siblings – did you usually have the 'centre stage' for yourself? As only child, did you spend more time in the company of adults than a child with siblings would have? Determine what is/was the influence of such a social environment on your personality.

Self-evaluation question

- Adler does not adhere to a deterministic explanation of development. Discuss the alternative view that he presents for development.

5.7 Optimal development

Does Adler have a view of optimal development and functioning?

As we have seen, for Adler, the individual's essential quest is to overcome his or her inferiorities and to strive for superiority and perfection (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956:101–119). From his description of the different lifestyles, it is clear that Adler regards the *active–constructive lifestyle* as the most appropriate for achieving the basic human goals of superiority and perfection.

A closer analysis of Adler's description of this overriding quest yields additional insights into his ideas about optimal human development. The peak of this striving, according to Adler, is reached when the individual not only strives for perfection of the self (in an egocentric way), but places that striving at the service of society (Ansbacher, 1983:88). Adler regards this tendency, which he calls the *social interest* of the individual, as the cornerstone of mental health. Indeed, he argues that only a person with a well-developed social interest can truly be regarded as mentally healthy. According to Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956), social interest can be viewed as a barometer for a child's normality. An increase in social interest improves mental functioning as a social function, thereby increasing a child's sense of self-worth. It gives a child, and later on a grown-up, confidence in doing something for society. Individuals with a well-developed sense of social interest feel comfortable with their lives because they enjoy the same benefits as others in society; they feel valuable because they address feelings of inadequacy experienced by others in society, instead of focusing on their own personal feelings of inadequacy.

Social interest implies more than just empathy with other people. It can extend in space and time to include not only animals, plants and lifeless objects, but ultimately the whole cosmos. Adler sometimes describes this as a 'cosmic interest' and a 'feeling of harmony' with the universe (Adler, cited in Ansbacher, 1983:86). He sees this expanded form of social interest as a striving to reach the ultimate goal of human evolution of a perfect all-encompassing community (Ansbacher, 1983).

In Adler's theoretical framework, the optimally developed person is therefore someone who has a widely expanded social interest and empathy with other people and who feels united with the present and future worlds as a whole. Social interest includes characteristics such as love of one's neighbour, awareness

of the environment, and involvement in the future development of the world. Although the ideal might appear to be unattainable, we should not lose sight of Adler's concept of *fictional finalism*. Even though the ideals that people hold may be fictions, they can still strive for the fulfilment of these ideals as if they were attainable. In this way a mechanism for self-enhancement is established.

Self-evaluation question

- Do you think it is possible to attain optimal development according to Adler? If so, what are the implications for humankind of optimally functioning individuals?

5.8 Views on psychopathology

How does Adler view a malfunctioning individual, especially a neurotic person?

As mentioned previously, Adler regards social interest as the cornerstone of mental health. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that he sees psychopathology as being rooted in a lack of social interest and an excessive preoccupation with the self. For Adler, the common characteristic of all mentally ill people is that they think only of themselves and their own problems, and are not able to engage in interaction with others (Ansbacher, 1983:88; Rychlak, 1981:154). This selfishness and lack of social interest manifest itself in an inferiority complex or a superiority complex (Durbin, 2008).

Like Freud, Adler sees no essential difference between mental health and psychopathology. The mentally healthy person is simply more successful at dealing with life's problems than the neurotic person, while the psychotic fails totally to cope with life.

As a result of their self-involvement, neurotics do not succeed in solving life's major problems (sex, interaction with others and occupational life). They develop various inefficient coping strategies that are, as a rule, characterised by the habit of offering excuses for their failures. The typical response of the neurotic, according to Adler, is: 'Yes, but ...' (Adler, cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956:302). He also calls this tendency the 'life lie' to distinguish it from the lifestyle of the mentally healthy person (Rychlak, 1981:154). Neurotic people try to create the impression that they could have solved their problems if circumstances had been more favourable or if other people had not somehow prevented them from doing so.

Dreikurs, a well-known modern advocate of individual psychology, says that, to a large extent, modern society must be held responsible for the origin of psychopathology. Its emphasis on competition and status and the pressure on children to achieve from an early age is, according to him, the cause of widespread insecurity and fear.

It is this doubt of oneself, expressed in a feeling of inadequacy and inferiority, which restricts our social interest and which is at the root of all maladjustment and psychopathology (Dreikurs, 1963:245).

Self-evaluation question

- Compare Adler's view of psychopathology with Freud's view.

5.9 Implications and applications

The central tenet of Adler's theory (that each person is ultimately responsible for determining his or her own life) should be borne in mind when considering the implications of the theory for practical aspects of life. The general tendency of Adler's influence is clearly connected to his emphasis on people's essential freedom of choice and on how they interpret the circumstances in which they find themselves.

What are the implications of Adler's theory for education, psychotherapy, measurement, research and the interpretation and handling of aggression?

Although Adler's theory has implications for just about every aspect of life and for all work, which involves dealing with people, few modern psychological methods and techniques are linked to his name. There are, however, many modern educational methods and psychotherapeutic techniques that have been influenced either directly or indirectly by Adler's thinking. Some examples of practical applications of his theory follow below.

5.9.1 Education

Adler had a great influence on education, especially in Austria. He played an important role in establishing the first child guidance clinics, geared in particular towards dealing with so-called 'problem children'. These clinics were established first in Vienna and later in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Poland and America (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1970:382–383; Dreikurs, 1963). In trying to understand so-called 'problem children', Adler emphasised the joint responsibility between parents and their children for the children's behaviour (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1970:381).

Adler's view and emphasis on people's ability to decide and determine their own actions and to use circumstances creatively was an important feature of the work in these clinics.

5.9.2 Psychotherapy

Although Adler is often described as a depth psychologist, his therapeutic techniques are not typical of depth psychology. He did not really try to solve deep, unconscious problems; he tried instead to appeal to the client's insight and social interest. To do this, he often used ordinary common sense and good human relationships.

His therapy is based on the premise that the symptoms of the mentally ill are the result of a defective lifestyle. The therapist's goal is, therefore, to win his client's confidence and help him or her to gain insight into an ineffective lifestyle. Then, by a process of re-education, the therapist tries to help the client to develop a more effective lifestyle. To achieve this, the therapist depends on the client's inherent social interest, which the therapist tries to stimulate by showing a genuine interest in the client. In this way the client hopefully experiences contact with at least one other person. This contact can act as a stimulus for the growth of the client's social interest, a characteristic that Adler regards as a natural tendency of every person, that is, to be interested in the environment and his or her fellow human beings (Ansbacher, 1983:99–102; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956:326–348; Rychlak, 1981:159–162).

Although Adler did not develop any sensationally new therapeutic techniques, he was one of the first therapists to involve parents, teachers and siblings in the treatment of problem children based on his propositions regarding social interest. This innovation impacted on the theory and practice of psychotherapy, stimulating the emergence of group therapy, play therapy and art therapy (Adler, 1963); and also to family therapy (Deutsch 1967), community psychiatry (Papanek, 1965) and action therapy (O'Connell, 1972). He greatly influenced some famous therapists such as Albert Ellis and Carl Rogers. Ellis's (1973) *rational-emotive therapy* is actually an expansion and refinement of Adler's therapeutic approach. There are also a number of similarities between Rogers' (1951) *client-centred therapy* and Adler's therapeutic approach. Both Rogers and Adler believed that, in the final analysis, the inherent strength of the individual decided the success of therapy. Adler believed in the inherent social interest of the client, while Rogers placed his faith in a similar strength, which he called the *actualising tendency*.

Both attempted to stimulate this inherent strength through the nature of their contact with the client. An important difference, though, is that Adler tried to improve the client's insight by interpreting and explaining the client's behaviour, while Rogers disapproved of interpretations and explanations. Another difference is that Adler deliberately attempted re-education while Rogers regarded it as unwise to do so.

Adler was thoroughly aware of clients' attempts to manipulate the therapist, and was extremely resourceful in his use of interpersonal strategies to control the behaviour of clients (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). For example, he would say to a depressive client: 'Do not strain yourself, only do what you enjoy.' If the client replied that he or she did not enjoy anything, Adler would answer: 'Well, do not take the trouble to do what you find unpleasant' (Rychlak, 1981:166–167). In this way the client would be forced to respond in some way to the therapist, and so the client's social interest would be stimulated.

Self-evaluation question

- What are the differences and/or similarities between Adler's view of psychotherapy compared to the views of other depth psychologists such as Freud and Jung, and a person-oriented psychologist such as Rogers?

5.9.3 Measurement and research

Adler's emphasis on freedom of will and individuals' ability to interpret and shape their own circumstances and lifestyles almost rules out the possibility of drawing general conclusions and designing general laws about human behaviour. 'Laws' and regularities that may govern the life of one person are not necessarily valid for another. The implication for psychological measurement and research is that psychologists should try to understand the individual and not seek to discover general laws of behaviour in order to comprehend and predict individual behaviour. For Adler, this implies that in order to understand a particular individual and predict his or her behaviour, it is necessary to know and understand that person's specific lifestyle. To achieve this, Adler made use of *comparison*, *early recollections*, and *dreams* (Rychlak, 1981:162–167).

Comparison

Psychologists can glean a fair amount of information about individuals' lifestyles by paying careful attention to various aspects of their behaviour and comparing these aspects in order to identify consistencies and inconsistencies (Adler, 1925). For example, the psychologist may compare individuals' overt behaviour with their memories in order to identify such consistencies and inconsistencies, or may compare different aspects of individuals' lives by noting how much time and attention they devote to each of these aspects.

In the therapeutic situation the psychologist may compare how clients enter the consulting room, or the nature of the complaints, which led them to seek professional assistance. Therapists can also compare themselves with their clients by constantly asking themselves, 'What goal would I be seeking if I were to behave like this client?'

Accurate observation is important when making comparisons. This is a method that is rich in possibilities, but it also holds the danger of imprecision and subjective distortions by the psychologist, particularly since Adler does not provide much in the way of detail or methodological rules.

Early recollections

According to Adler (1931), individuals' *early recollections* provide a guide to uncovering their lifestyles. Because the lifestyle takes shape during the first four or five years, Adler believed that the early recollections of this period would indicate the lifestyle that would characterise the person as an adult. Schultz and Schultz (2005) points out that it made little difference to Adler whether these early recollections were of real events or fantasies, because in either case the remembered incident is of primary interest in determining the person's lifestyle.

Shulman (1962) developed a *Family Constellation Interview Guide*, which reveals the subjectively perceived early environment and the individual's choice of reaction to it. It gives a historical illumination of an individual's present values and techniques and a personal view of him- or herself and others; in short, of his or her *style of life*.

Dreams

Adler (1925; 1931) agreed with Freud about the importance of dreams for the understanding of individual behaviour. He regarded dreams as an indication of a person's fictional goals and, more specifically, as an attempt to move from present problems towards accomplishing established goals (Rychlak, 1981:165). Adler, however, did not believe that dreams fulfil wishes or reveal repressed unconscious conflicts as Freud did. Thus, for Adler, dreams are oriented toward the present problems and future goals of the person and not toward conflicts of the past.

Adler maintained that dreams should never be interpreted without taking the knowledge of the person's situation and his or her lifestyle into account. As with comparisons, Adler tried to interpret dreams by putting himself into his clients' position in order to compare his own behaviour and experience with those of the clients.

Family constellation research

Adler's theory did not give much impetus to empirical research, probably because its core concepts – lifestyle and social interest – are somewhat broad and vague, and do not readily lend themselves to empirical testing (Aiken, 1993; Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981; Maddi, 1989; Rotter, 1982). One aspect of Adler's theory that did, however, lead to a fair amount of research was his view of the influence of the family constellation on personality. Research results have not, however, yielded any clarity as to how correct Adler's views are in this regard, as some findings confirm his theory while others do not.

Most of the research that has been conducted on the *effects of birth order* focused on first-borns, while less research has been conducted on second-born children and last-born children (Schultz & Schultz 2005). Earlier research concentrated more on the relation between birth order and the development of intelligence and academic achievement, confirming some of Adler's hypotheses. Schachter (1963), Altus (1966) and Breland (1974) found that the proportion of first-born children among university students is greater than that of first-born children in the general population. First-borns tend to reach higher levels of intellectual achievement in academic settings and higher levels of power and prestige in their careers. These findings correspond with Adler's expectation that eldest children are inclined to be ambitious as a result of their ordinal position within the family. However, evidence that first-born children are better achievers – as would be expected on the basis of this theory – is inconclusive (Campbell, 1933; Falbo, 1981). It was also found that first-borns score higher on achievement tests (Kelleghan & MacNamara, 1972; Paulhus & Shaffer, 1981) and intelligence tests (Belmont & Marolla, 1973; Zajonc, Markus & Markus, 1979), have stronger dependency needs (Schachter, 1963) and choose teaching, medicine, science and business management as careers (Bryant, 1987).

There seems to be little support from research to validate all Adler's propositions with regard to the influence of birth order on personality. Adler should, however, be credited for being the first psychologist to suggest that birth order might affect a person's personality and lifestyle.

Enrichment

The debate over the effect of birth order on personality stimulated continuous interest for more than 100 years. The publication of Sulloway's (1996) book, *Born to rebel: birth order, family dynamics, and creative lives*, produced a new wave of research on the relation between birth order and personality. The results vary from support for Sulloway's model of personality, predicting a significant relation between birth order and personality traits (Paulhus, Trapnell & Chen, 1999; Healy & Ellis, 2007), to only a subtle effect of birth order on personality (Jefferson, Herbst & McCrae, 1998, to contradictory results and findings (Michalski & Shackelford, 2002) and lastly to results finding no significant relation between birth order and personality (Marini & Kurtz, 2011; Rohrer, Egloff & Schmukle, 2015).

In an article, *Settling the effects of birth order on personality*, Damain & Roberts (2015) come to the conclusion that despite the constant stream of research the results remain inconclusive and controversial.

Self-evaluation questions

- Compare Adler's view of dreams with Freud's and Jung's.
- Discuss Adler's view of the influence of birth order on personality and critically evaluate the validity of his view in light of research results.

5.9.4 The interpretation and handling of aggression

It is interesting to note that it was Adler who introduced the concept of an *aggressive drive* into the psychoanalytical school of thought. In 1931, Adler referred to his concept that people were inherently aggressive, which he called an *aggressive drive*, 'imprudent'. He has since come to realise that this was not a drive, but an attitude that people had towards life and should therefore be viewed in the context of a social element in personality (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956).

The key to Adler's view of aggression lies in the words 'a partly conscious, partly irrational attitude towards the tasks which life imposes'. *Aggression*, then, is a particular way of behaving which an individual adopts in order to accomplish certain life tasks, and which is not fully rational. It is interesting to note that Adler writes little about aggression and that, when he does, he mentions it chiefly as something that plays an important role in neurotic behaviour. According to Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956), Adler included aggression in the overall idea of addressing issues in society. Aggression was simply one of the means that a person whose social interest was lacking would use in an attempt to address these issues.

In terms of Adler's theory, aggression must therefore be interpreted as behaviour to which people resort in an effort to come to grips with life tasks and problems when their social interest is not adequately developed. As would be expected, such defective development is associated mainly with the two destructive lifestyles. The implication of this view is that aggression has to be dealt with by attempting to awaken and strengthen people's social interest, which Adler believes can be done through sincere efforts to make genuine contact with people on a human level. This would apply to immediate situations of violence, as well as to long-term social and political conflict.

Example

If a woman were threatened by a man who intended to rape her, Adler would have regarded it as correct behaviour on her part if she tried to make human contact with the aggressor. She should have let him know that she is a person and that he is harming her and causing her pain.

Adler would also have advocated that social tension and violence should be dealt with by means of sincere, genuine human contact directed at making everyone involved aware that violence harms people, and by convincing people in general that they should extend their social interest to include other and even 'hostile' groups. According to Adler, the ultimate solution to the problem of aggression and violence lies in attaining a situation in which people's social interest is optimally developed so that it includes all of humanity, both present and future.

Self-evaluation questions

- Compare Adler's view of aggression with Freud's views.
- What are the implications of Adler's view of the handling of aggression for the present-day violence in our society?

5.10 Evaluation of the theory

What was Adler's influence on psychology in general?

Adler exerted a great influence on psychology both within and outside the domain of depth psychology. Ellis (1970:11–12) says:

Alfred Adler, even more than Freud, is probably the true father of modern psychotherapy. Some of the reasons are: He founded ego psychology, which Freudians only recently discovered. He was one of the first humanist psychologists ... Adler strongly influenced the work of Sullivan, Horney, Fromm, Rogers, May, Maslow and many other writers on psychotherapy, some of whom are often wrongly called neo-Freudians, when they more correctly could be called neo-Adlerians ... My own system of rational-emotive psychotherapy was profoundly influenced by Adler ... It is difficult to find any leading therapist who in some respect does not owe a great debt to the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler.

Other psychologists strongly influenced by Adler are Viktor Frankl, Kurt Lewin, Fritz Heider, George Kelly, Julian Rotter (Corsini & Marsella, 1983:108) and Gordon Allport.

Why did Adler receive such limited recognition despite the great influence he seemed to have on psychology in general?

Compared to Freud and Jung, it seems that Adler received rather limited recognition for his significant influence on psychology. This situation could perhaps be accounted for by the following reasons:

- It is difficult to test the validity of his theoretical concepts empirically (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981).
- Many of his ideas have been absorbed into the general stream of psychological thinking, although psychologists are not aware of this (Mischel, 1993).
- Adler offers few new or surprising interpretations of human behaviour and he did not produce any particularly interesting new techniques for therapy or methods for the measurement of personality. His way of trying to understand people and to change their behaviour, like his entire theory, corresponds to a large extent with common sense and the opinion of the general public.
- Another reason may have been his modesty. Ansbacher (1983:116) expresses the view that Adler was far less conspicuous and more modest than Freud.

It is also possible that Adler is given insufficient recognition as a theorist because his style of writing is not clear, and because he never gave a full exposition of his theory (Feist & Feist 1998). Most of his ideas were actually conveyed during lectures, and much of his work was later assembled and published by other people, sometimes in a rather haphazard fashion, so that it is difficult to have a clear overview of his conceptual system as a whole. This probably also accounts for the fact that his perspective is sometimes incorrectly understood and rejected on faulty grounds. Even someone like Viktor Frankl, who regarded himself as a kind of successor to Adler, did not always interpret his ideas correctly. Frankl voices strong criticism of Adler's notions about the striving for power without taking into account Adler's later ideas about the striving for superiority. The work of Heinz and Rowena Ansbacher (1956; 1970) has contributed much towards making Adler's thinking more accessible and widely known.

Perhaps the most important reason for the lack of recognition, however, is that Adler's theory falls somewhere between two psychological traditions – depth psychology and the holistic and person-oriented theories – and is not totally acceptable to either. There is a strange contradiction implicit in the theory: on the one hand it says that up to the age of about five, children have the freedom to determine their own lifestyles. In other words, when they are at an age where, according to conventional wisdom, they are not yet fully conscious of the factors that influence their goals, nor do they have any insight into the implications of their goals, yet they have the capability of making conscious decisions about complex issues such as life goals. However, adults, who have definite consciousness and clear insight are paradoxically described by Adler as not having the freedom to determine their lifestyle because, in their case, this has already been formed and is difficult or impossible to change.

The inference is that the ability to make decisions freely is connected with the (unconscious) functioning of the child, whereas the (conscious) functioning of the adult is associated with a lack of freedom!

Adler's emphasis on individual freedom and the individual's ability to determine his or her own direction in life makes his theory unacceptable to Freudian depth psychologists who believe that the individual's behaviour and development are determined by forces in the psyche over which the individual has no control (*psychic determinism*). Holistic psychologists and person-oriented theorists do not fully accept Adler's deterministic views on adult functioning as they believe that the adult is able to make free decisions, and that this freedom in adults is associated with consciousness and insight.

Despite his limited recognition, the followers of Adler, such as Ansbacher (1983), claim that individual psychology is becoming more popular among psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and educators and that more research is being performed on Adlerian concepts. *Individual Psychology: The Journal of Adlerian Theory, Research and Practice* is published quarterly by the North American Society of Adlerian psychology, and individual-psychology associations are established throughout the Western world. In 1967 the Minnesota Adlerian Society was founded, which became the Alfred Adler Institute of Minnesota in 1969, and formally changed to the Adler Graduate School in 2004. This school offers a Master of Arts in Adlerian Counselling and Psychotherapy and several speciality study programmes.

Self-evaluation question

- What do you think is Adler's main contribution to psychology and to personality psychology in particular?

5.11 Suggested reading

Adler, A (1925). *The practice and theory of individual psychology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Adler, A (1931). *What life should mean to you*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Adler, A (1938). *Social interest: A challenge to mankind*. London: Faber & Faber.

Adler, A (1969). *Understanding human nature*. New York: Fawcett.

Ansbacher, HL and Ansbacher, RR (eds.). (1956). *The individual psychology of Alfred Adler. A systematic presentation in selections from his writings*. New York: Basic Books

Ansbacher, HL and Ansbacher, RR (eds.). (1970). *Alfred Adler: Superiority and social interest. A collection of later writings*. (2nd ed.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.



Chapter 6

The socially-oriented psychoanalytical theories

Henning Viljoen

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6.1 Outcomes

- Understand what is meant by a **socially-oriented psychoanalytical approach**.
- **Grasp how Horney's optimistic view** of the person differs from **Freud's pessimistic view** and why she broke away from Freud's orthodox views.
- Understand Horney's psychodynamic approach, concentrating on **basic anxiety** and **hostility** and the way people deal with it as the core aspects of human functioning.
- Explain Horney's view of the differences between a **neurotic personality** and **optimal functioning**.
- Evaluate Horney's place in personology.
- Understand Fromm's **sociobiological** and **dualistic approach** to human nature.
- Explain Fromm's distinction between **temperament** and **character**.
- Grasp how a person's **socialisation** is reflected in different **character types** according to Fromm.
- Acknowledge the role he ascribes to **society** in his view of **optimal functioning** and **psychopathology**.
- Understand and evaluate Fromm's contribution to the **pathogenesis of aggression** and **destructive behaviour**.
- Evaluate Fromm's unique **sociocultural contribution** to personology.

6.2 Introduction

Who and what are the socially-oriented psychoanalysts?

With the advent of sociology and anthropology as disciplines in their own right towards the end of the nineteenth century, a shift in emphasis came about in psychological thinking (as indicated in the historical overview in Chapter 2). Human beings were no longer regarded purely as individuals but also as social beings. Although Freud's concept of the superego allows for social factors, orthodox psychoanalytical theory puts more emphasis on biological and intrapsychic aspects of the personality than on cultural and interpersonal factors. Alfred Adler was the first psychoanalyst to give adequate attention to the *social dimension* of human existence. Karen Horney and Erich Fromm added their contributions to this initial work.

Unlike Freud's direct followers like Otto Rank, Sandor Ferenczi, Wilhelm Reich and Wilhelm Stekel, the socially-oriented psychoanalysts are only partially indebted to orthodox Freudian views. They reject the biological determinism of Freudian thinking and its exaggerated accent on sex. Instead, they emphasise the role of *social* and *cultural factors* in the development of personality. While they do not deny the importance of the unconscious, they turn their attention to the consciousness and its manifestations in a concept of the 'self'. Regardless of whether the self is seen as

an innate potential (as Adler does) or as the outcome of both innate and acquired characteristics (as Fromm does), the ‘self’ represents the unique individuality of each person for these theorists.

Notwithstanding the central role these thinkers ascribe to social and cultural factors, this view of the self implies that the individual need never become swamped by society’s demands for conformity. The psychologically healthy person is able to strike a balance between his or her own needs and those of society.

Strictly speaking, however, the approaches of Horney and Fromm do not meet the requirements of personality theories and should be seen as general philosophical systems rather than personality theories. They do not aspire to the rank of full-blown personality theories and so do not provide clear expositions of the structure, dynamics or development of personality. Many of these aspects have therefore to be inferred from their work. Because the work of Horney and Fromm has revealed important insights, their approaches cannot be omitted from any serious study of personality.

Self-evaluation question

- What are the major differences between the orthodox psychoanalytical approach and the socially-oriented approaches?

Karen Horney

6.3 Background

Why did Horney break away from orthodox psychoanalysis and how did her own life experiences influence her theory?



Karen Horney
Source: Public domain:
MTlwNjA4

Karen Horney (1885–1952) was born in Hamburg and studied medicine at the University of Freiburg and Berlin. She underwent analysis with Karl Abraham and Hans Sachs and then did a course in psychoanalysis at the Berlin Institute of Psychoanalysis. In addition to running a private practice, she taught at the Berlin Institute of Psychoanalysis from 1918 to 1932, when she emigrated to America to take up the post of co-director of the Chicago Institute of Psychoanalysis. Two years later she moved to New York, where she worked at the New York Institute of Psychoanalysis. In 1941 she made a final break with traditional psychoanalysis and became the founder of the *American Institute of Psychoanalysis* and of the *Society for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis* (Ewen, 2010; Hall, Lindzey, Loehlin & Manosevitz, 1985; Ryckman, 1993; Smith & Vetter, 1982).

Although Horney was schooled in orthodox psychoanalysis and originally worked within that tradition, her move to America made her realise that the biological determinism and emphasis on sexuality of Freudian thinking was not appropriate to American people of the depression years. Like Erich Fromm, she came to the

conclusion that human behaviour is shaped more by the culture in which a person lives than by biology or sexuality. She also realised that the conflict from which problems arise should be sought in the interaction between the person and his or her environment rather than in opposing forces in the personality (the id and the superego) as propounded in Freudian theory. In her opinion, each culture generates its own fears within its members. For example, people who live at the foot of a volcano and are continually under the shadow of death have to deal with fears different to those experienced by people who live near hostile neighbours or in a society that values competition highly. Horney shifts the emphasis of Freud's intrapsychic foundation to an interpersonal foundation.

Enrichment

On the following webpage Dr CG Boeree (2006) provides a concise overview of Horney's life and theory:

<http://webspaceship.edu/cgboer/horney.html/>

Video: Karen Horney Movie

Angela Mann gives an illustrated biographical overview of Karen Horney's life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLOUyR99cjl>

Self-evaluation question

- What are the main differences between the views of Horney and Freud?

6.4 The view of the person underlying the theory

How did Horney's work with neurotic individuals influence her view of the person who underlies her theory?

Since Horney's theory was developed largely in an attempt to understand the neurotic personality, it is impossible to discuss her theoretical views without referring to the neurotic personality.

Horney's views regarding personality and psychotherapy are based on the supposition that people have an inherent drive and capacity to grow and realise their potential to the fullest. Like Adler, and unlike Freud, she believes that people's inherent nature is constructive. Horney (1950:15) maintains that this belief does not imply that people are essentially good, presupposing a given knowledge about good and bad, but that people by their own accord would strive toward self-realisation. This drive can be inhibited by unhealthy relationships with self or others, and its absence may lead to sickness and even death.

Horney thus proceeds from an *optimistic view of humanity*, based on the assumption that the personality inherently tends towards constructive development and growth. She also believes that individuals are able to consciously change and shape their personalities and that they are not simply helpless victims of past experience. Current experience is equally important. Horney (1942) is so convinced of the growth potential of each individual that she puts considerable emphasis in therapy on self-analysis and people's ability to deal with their own problems. In her view, self-knowledge fosters spontaneous growth and development, and consequently she sees self-knowledge as a responsibility, as well as a privilege. She rejects the Freudian deterministic notion that human behaviour is determined by instinct and hence not subject to personal control. According to her, every person has the potential to achieve self-actualisation.

Horney's optimistic view of human beings leads her to conclude that the difference between normal and neurotic people is only one of degree, and that neurotic people simply need to be set free from the limitations that block their inherent growth potential.

Self-evaluation question

- Why can Horney's view of the person be described as 'optimistic'?

6.5 The structure of the personality

Although Horney places more emphasis on the dynamics of the personality, did she acknowledge any structural components at all?

Horney does not elaborate in any detail on the structure and development of the personality, because in her view it is more important to understand the psychodynamics of the personality – especially those of the neurotic personality. 'I do not consider it feasible to localize neurotic conflicts in a schematic way, as Freud does.' (Horney, 1939:191) The result is that where she does pay attention to structural elements or principles of development, it is always as part of her view regarding the dynamics of personality.

Horney did not reject Freud's work as a whole, and accepts the important role of the unconscious and of processes such as repression – but she does not see these as the most important aspects of human functioning. Horney (1950) does make a distinction between an *idealised self*, an *actual self* and a *real self*.

KEY TERM

idealised self:

unconsciously created in an attempt to deal with anxiety and to compensate for feelings of inferiority

- The **idealised self** is the product of a feeling of inferiority, which is especially common in a society that places a high value on prestige and competition. The feeling of inferiority causes anxiety, and in an attempt to deal with the anxiety and compensate for the feeling of inferiority, the person unconsciously creates an ideal self, which is omnipotent and has unlimited potential.

KEY TERMS

actual self: represents a person as he or she consciously acts in daily life

real self: a force that urges the person to grow and be self-fulfilled

- The **actual self** represents people as they consciously act in daily life. The actual self is often rejected because it does not meet the demands of the ideal self.
- The **real self** is fundamental to both the ideal self and the actual self. It emerges only once the person has relinquished all the techniques developed for dealing with anxiety and resolving conflict. For Horney, the real self is a force that urges the individual in the direction of growth and self-fulfilment and it is ‘the alive, unique, personal center of ourselves’ (Horney, 1950:155).

Self-evaluation question

- How does Horney’s view of the ‘self’ differ from the views of the ‘self’ as proposed by Jung, Adler, Maslow and Rogers?

6.6 The dynamics of the personality

Horney is of the opinion that the personality is geared towards constructive growth and development, thanks to an inherent *growth principle* (which replaces Freud’s *id*). According to the growth principle, all energy is naturally channelled in such a way as to ensure that the individual will develop his or her unique potential to the full, unless it becomes blocked as a result of some ‘anti-natural’ influence (such as culture or parents). In other words, a person’s development can be facilitated or hampered by his or her interaction with the environment, and in this regard, cultural factors and a child’s relationship with his or her parents play the most important roles.

What are a person’s basic needs, according to Horney?

Horney (1937) distinguishes two crucial needs that underlie all physiological and psychological needs and are fundamental to the unfolding of the personality, namely:

- the **need for security** or safety (that is, the need to be free from anxiety and threat)
- the **need for satisfaction** (that is, basic physiological needs such as the need for food, water, sex and sleep).

At first the child is entirely dependent on his or her environment and parents for the satisfaction of physical and psychological needs. In Horney’s view, this dependence may lead to neurosis or feelings of inferiority that must later be compensated for in adult life but which, if correctly handled, may promote growth.

What are the factors promoting or inhibiting personal growth, according to Horney?

Horney is of the opinion that in fulfilling a child’s needs, one of two things can happen with the child that will determine whether or not growth takes place:

- The parents may act with real love and warmth in relation to the child, and in doing so create an atmosphere in which needs can be satisfied and growth can take place. An atmosphere such as this, which facilitates growth,

is characterised by a genuine interest in the child, an attitude of respect, warmth, reliability and sincerity in the parents' dealing with the child.

- In contrast with this, parents' irresponsibility, together with 'neuroticising cultural influences' (conflicting cultural values), may prevent the fulfilment of needs, and this may lead to 'basic hostility' and 'basic anxiety' as the forerunners of neurosis (Horney, 1939:86).

What happens to the child if need-fulfilment is hampered or prevented?

Horney maintains that a child who is prevented from fulfilling his or her basic needs due to disturbed parent–child relationships or negative factors in the environment will react with **basic hostility** and **basic anxiety**. These are two core concepts in Horney's theory in explaining a person's behaviour.

KEY TERMS

basic hostility: the result of children's conflicting experiences in interaction with the environment

basic anxiety: a pervasive feeling of helplessness when a child is unable to cope with his or her environment

- **Basic hostility** arises as a result of children's conflictual experience: on one hand, they are psychologically and physically dependent on their environment, and on the other, they may experience their environment as hostile if their needs for warmth and love are not met. Hence the child develops basic hostility in response to the perceived hostility of the environment – when the child feels small, insignificant, helpless, threatened and rejected, he or she becomes hostile towards 'a world that is out to cheat, attack, humiliate, betray' (Horney, 1937:92).
- **Basic anxiety** is the more pervasive feeling of helplessness that children experience when they are unable to cope with their environment. Horney (1937:89) describes it as an 'insidiously, all-pervading feeling of being lonely and helpless in a hostile world'.

According to Horney (1945:41) there are factors in the parent–child relationship that may give rise to the hostility and anxiety, namely:

... direct or indirect domination, indifference, erratic behaviour, lack of respect for the child's individual needs, lack of real guidance, disparaging attitudes, too much admiration or the absence of it, lack of reliable warmth, having to take sides in parental disagreements, too much or too little responsibility, overprotection, isolation from other children, injustice, discrimination, unkept promises, hostile atmosphere, and so on and so on.

In addition, Horney maintains that there are also certain culture-specific factors that may lead to basic hostility and anxiety. She believes Western culture of the twentieth century is typical of a culture with properties that promote neurosis, such as the adherence to conflicting values.

Example

The values expressed in competitiveness and the compulsion to succeed, to come out on top, are in direct conflict with the Christian demand for humility, obedience and neighbourly love. The emphasis on self-realisation and the expectation to be altruistic towards others give rise to a conflicting experience. Irreconcilable values such as these may well have a neurotic effect on Westerners living in capitalistic societies. They may lead to tension, insecurity and feelings of helplessness, all of which culminate in basic anxiety.



Western culture promotes neurosis by cultivating conflicting values expressed in the achievement of success in competitions and humility and to be the least as Christian values demand.
Source: iStock Photo: 6192212

In a multicultural society like South Africa, conflicting cultural values may cause tension and basic anxiety. The collective existence amongst Africans, as characterised by the philosophy of *ubuntu* (Zulu) or *Batho* (Sotho), implies that 'a person is only a person because of other people' and it represents a code of ethics based on humility, empathy, compassion, care, sharing and hospitality (Boon, 2007:26). This code of ethics can be experienced as incongruous with the individualistic and materialistic demands of the South African business society.

Activity

Looking at the present day South African society, select and determine conflicting cultural values that may cause tension, feelings of insecurity and eventually basic anxiety.

How do people deal with basic hostility and anxiety?

Both basic hostility and basic anxiety are repressed and unconscious. Horney (1937; 1942) initially believed that they manifested themselves as *neurotic needs*. Because of her view that the difference between neurotic and normal people is only one of degree and that everyone experiences both healthy and unhealthy forces, Horney maintained that neurotic needs are present in all people to a greater or lesser extent.

In her later work, Horney (1945; 1950) sees these needs or tendencies as becoming linked with particular ways of reacting or relating to others, thereby constituting an *interpersonal style*. People develop these styles as a means of coping with basic hostility and anxiety. She therefore reduced the initial ten needs to three interpersonal styles or ways of relating to people, namely a movement *towards others*, *against others* and *away from others*. According to Horney, these ways of relating can also be expressed in a normal or a neurotic manner. This change in her thinking gave her approach a stronger interpersonal emphasis and at the same time took her further away from Freud's intrapsychic principles.

6.6.1 Interpersonal styles

How do people function according to these different interpersonal styles?

According to Horney, these three kinds of interpersonal reactions are irreconcilable and preclude one another because a person cannot simultaneously move towards, against or away from people. The normal person does have recourse to all three on an alternating basis, whereas the neurotic individual tends to become fixated on one style which he or she uses in relation to everyone, regardless of how appropriate or inappropriate it may be.

Horney also believed that these interpersonal styles underlie three *basic personality types*, namely: *submissive*, *hostile* and *detached*.

Movement towards others

In healthy development, people move towards other people in a cooperative and affectionate way. When moving towards other people becomes excessive and fixated, they acknowledge their own helplessness and seek affection and permanent support from those people. This is usually found in individuals who have been brought up in another person's shadow, such as that of a parent who demands complete devotion from a favourite child in return for the privilege of being the favourite. Horney (1945:51) classifies such people as *submissive* or *compliant types* and maintains that their basic philosophy is expressed in the idea that if you are submissive you won't get hurt. She describes this type as follows:

... this type needs to be liked, wanted, desired, loved; to feel accepted, welcomed, approved of, appreciated; to be needed, to be of importance to others, especially to one particular person; to be helped, protected, taken care of, guided.

Such people, under the guise of self-abasement, actually 'sell their souls' in exchange for the love and protection of others. Any criticism, rejection or desertion by others is terrifying, and they will do anything possible to win back the positive regard of the person threatening them.

Movement against others

In normal development, moving against people could be seen as assertiveness and an ability to argue and differ from other people. In an excessive and fixated form of moving against other people, individuals do not accept their separateness and take it as axiomatic that hostility has to be met with hostility. They mistrust the feelings and intentions of other people and are obsessed with power, prestige, personal achievement and the exploitation of other people. Such people, says Horney, typically live by the philosophy that 'if I have power, no-one can hurt me' (1937:98) and she classifies this kind of individual as the *hostile* or *aggressive type* who evaluates any situation in terms of 'what can I get out of this?'.

Horney (1950) describes people who belong to this category as having an expansionist interpersonal style and as seeking to dominate others and to achieve their own goals at all costs. According to her there are three types of expansionist style:

- The *narcissistic type* are people with great self-confidence who expect other people to return their favours with interest.
- The *perfectionist type* are people who believe their abilities to be superior and blame their mistakes on others' incompetence.
- The *arrogant/vengeful type* are people who are highly competitive and glory in the way they out-manoeuvre other people.

Movement away from others

When people move away from other people they want to avoid being dependent on others, but have no wish to be hostile towards them. The disengagement of this type of person occurs when the demands of the environment become too great. They feel threatened and 'cut out' like an overloaded circuit. Horney (1945:75) describes such a person as typically believing that 'if I withdraw, no-one will be able to hurt me', and she classifies this kind of individual as the *detached* or *aloof* type. It is important for people of this type:

... to put emotional distance between themselves and others. More accurately, it is conscious and unconscious determination not to get emotionally involved with others in any way, whether in love, fight, cooperation, or competition. They draw around themselves a kind of magic circle which no-one may penetrate.

Detached types tend to be secretive about their personal lives and they prefer to work, eat and sleep alone in order to prevent being disturbed by others. They suppress all feelings toward others, avoid relationships and enjoy solitude. They will fight for their beliefs and to maintain their integrity. This is potentially the most destructive interpersonal style and is found in its extreme form in psychotic behaviour.

Activity

- Now that you know how people function according to Horney, did you experience 'conflicting cultural values' growing up as a child? If that was the case, determine if it had an influence on your personal growth and your basic personality type.
- Determine the interpersonal style of a few people you know.

Self-evaluation question

- How would you describe successful parents according to Horney? What are the negative implications for human behaviour of less successful parenthood?
- According to Horney, how does one deal with basic anxiety and hostility?
- Determine the similarities or differences between Horney's interpersonal styles and Adler's types of lifestyle.

6.7 The development of the personality

Horney did not present an original view of the development of personality, but how did she agree or differ from Freud's view on crucial issues?

Although Horney agreed with Freud that the structure and functioning of the mature personality are shaped by childhood experiences, she does not concern herself with specific developmental stages of the personality. Her view of development differs in several important aspects from Freud's. For example, she holds (1945:242) that the personality is capable of change and so people do not have to surrender themselves to their pasts without complaint. As she puts it (1945:242):

... human personality can change. It is not only the young child who is pliable. All of us retain the capacity to change, even to change in fundamental ways, as long as we live.

She questions the validity of the psychosexual foundation of personality development proposed by Freud, particularly the role of the *Oedipus complex* and *penis envy* in the shaping of the female sexual identity, and his theory on *female masochism*.

Although Horney (1939) accepts the existence of a conflict between a child and his or her parents, she does not agree with Freud's view of the Oedipus complex, relating it to a sexual origin. According to her, the conflict relates to the basic anxiety caused by being dependent on parents and the need to be independent; thereby, shifting the emphasis from a sexual interpretation of Oedipal feelings to the interaction between a child and parents.

Horney rejects Freud's idea that the absence of a penis leads a female child to identify with her mother in the hope of becoming a mother herself and bearing a son, thereby indirectly attaining the desired object. She also rejects associating masochism with femaleness. According to Freud, the female is by nature sexually passive and this compels her to suppress her aggressiveness. It was his view that the sexual act and the process of giving birth are masochistic experiences for the female because they combine pleasure and pain (the penetration of the vagina during intercourse and the stretching of the vagina during the delivery of a child).

Horney maintains that such sex role differences are culturally induced and have nothing to do with the inherent nature of the female sex role. She is unable to accept that the behaviour of an organism that is biologically constructed to perform female functions can be psychologically controlled by a desire for male characteristics, or that women cannot simply derive pure pleasure from sex. Horney ascribes Freud's views to a cultural conception, which equates maleness to being human and, as such, superior to femaleness; femaleness is assigned a dependent and inferior role. In her own words (Horney, 1967:146):

The view that women are infantile and emotional creatures, and as such, incapable of responsibility and independence, is the work of the masculine tendency to lower women's self-respect.

Horney retaliated to Freud's concept of penis envy, which she rejected, by postulating the concept of **womb envy** in men on the basis of her experience with male patients. Men feel this envy towards women because they are unable to bear children.

KEY TERM

womb envy: the male equivalent of Freud's penis envy in women, where a man feels this envy towards a woman because he is unable to bear children

Horney (1967:60–61) expresses this as follows:

When one begins, as I did, to analyze men only after a fairly long experience of analyzing women, one receives a most surprising impression of the intensity of this envy of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood, as well as of the breast and the act of suckling.

According to Horney, womb envy is revealed in men's absorption in the advancement of their careers, as well as in their efforts to 'keep women in their place'. Schultz & Schultz (2005:164) summarises this as follows:

By denying women equal rights, minimizing their opportunities to contribute to society, and downgrading their efforts to achieve, men attempt to retain their 'natural' superiority. Underlying such behavior, however, is the sense of inferiority deriving from their womb envy.

Self-evaluation questions

- How does Horney differ from Freud with regard to the psychosexual foundation of personality?
- Do you think that Horney's views of penis envy and womb envy contributed to the emancipation of women in Western countries?

6.8 Optimal development and views on psychopathology

Why can't Horney's views regarding optimal development and psychopathology be separated?

Horney's views regarding optimal development and psychopathology are closely linked because for her the difference between normal, optimal functioning and neurosis is only a matter of degree.

Her views are reflected in the way she describes the *neurotic syndrome* and the *idealised self*, and the way it is given expression in the normal and in the neurotic personality. She explains the development of a neurotic syndrome by means of the concept of the *vicious circle* and the development of an *idealised self* (Horney, 1939 & 1950). The neurotic personality suppresses the unacceptable features and internal conflicts of the actual self and masks them through the development of an ideal self.

Example

Manipulative, submissive, neurotic types see themselves as unselfish, self-sacrificing people who deserve to be loved unconditionally and are thus able to mask their extreme dependency.

Hostile, neurotic types see themselves as powerful, respected leaders and in this way are able to cover up all feelings of dependence which they cannot acknowledge.

Withdrawn, aloof types of neurotic people suppress their need for affection by seeing themselves as self-sufficient and independent, needing nothing from anyone.

For neurotic people, the ideal self becomes their actual self, which gives rise to a vicious circle in which the neurotic syndrome is maintained, and from which the person cannot escape. The ideal self sets unrealistic goals, which these people are unable to achieve, although for the benefit of other people they will act as if they have been achieved. The discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self causes further basic hostility and anxiety, which in turn generate greater internal conflict, and this causes these people to invest even more in the ideal self. The ideal self is separated even further from the actual self – and so the vicious circle is perpetuated.

KEY TERM

tyranny of shoulds: a compulsive need that relentlessly drives neurotics to an idealised image of perfection

Horney maintains that the life of the neurotic person is regulated by the ideal self and the **tyranny of shoulds**, and the person becomes increasingly estranged from his or her actual self. The tyranny of shoulds is a compulsive need through which neurotics create an idealised image of themselves. In their imagination they become heroes, geniuses, supreme lovers, saints and gods. Horney (1950:65) describes the tyranny of shoulds that relentlessly drives neurotics as follows:

He should be the epitome of honesty, generosity, considerateness, justice, dignity, courage, unselfishness. He should be the perfect lover, husband, teacher. He should be able to endure everything, should like everybody, should love his parents, his wife, his country; or he should not be attached to anything or anybody, nothing should matter to him, he should never feel hurt, and he should always be serene and unruffled. He should always enjoy life; or, he should be above pleasure and enjoyment. He should be spontaneous; he should always control his feelings.

Competitiveness as a dominant characteristic of contemporary Western society could be classified as a tyranny of shoulds. Horney (1937) stresses the fact that modern society is based on the principle of individual competition and she refers to it as *hypercompetitiveness* or *neurotic competitiveness*. She describes it as an indiscriminate need or driving force to compete and win at all costs as a means to strengthen one's self-esteem. In order to compensate for feelings of low self-esteem, individuals compete and strive for superiority at the expense of others; thereby creating tension and hostility between individuals. Ryckmann, Hammer, Kaczor and Gold (1990) developed a self-report scale, the *Hypercompetitive Attitude Scale (HCA)*, to assess and measure Horney's concept of hypercompetitiveness. A further study by Ryckmann, Thornton and Butler (1994) focused on the assessment of Horney's personality correlates of hypercompetitive individuals. The results support Horney's description of a hypercompetitive person as narcissistic, sensation seeking, inflated self-esteem and an unrealistic conception of self-worth. It was also found that in order 'to bolster their self-esteem they must engage in a ceaseless round of social activities, including ones that are a little unconventional or illegal. Such activities seem designed to elicit the recognition and admiration that they believe they deserve' (Ryckmann, Thornton & Butler, 1994:91–92). Hypercompetitive individuals seem to display characteristics that are representative of *moving against other people* as an interpersonal style.

Horney also points out that neurotic people can also become estranged from other people if they become fixated upon one of the interpersonal styles. People who *move away from other people* are most likely to become psychotic.

It seems then, according to Horney, that neurotic people become estranged from their actual selves and other people because of their identification with the ideal self and their fixation upon one of the interpersonal styles. In her view, such people can be brought back in touch with their true potentialities (their actual selves) and with other people only through the medium of psychotherapy.

In contrast with neurotic people, for normal people the ideal self represents a goal that they would like to attain, and it is not something with which they have identified. In addition, there is usually only a moderate difference between the ideal and the actual self, which creates little anxiety or inner conflict for the person. Accordingly, such people's lives are not given over to the vicious circle that underlies the neurotic syndrome, nor are their lives controlled by the ideal self's tyranny of shoulds. Thus, optimal functioning implies that people are not alienated from their actual selves, and that they do not need to defend themselves during their interactions with other people by becoming fixed in one personal style. People are in contact with their actual selves and their true potentialities and are able to move freely towards, away from and against other people without any neurotic limitations.

Self-evaluation questions

- What are the roles of the 'neurotic syndrome' and the 'tyranny of shoulds' in Horney's view of the normal and neurotic personality?
- Do you see any similarities and/or differences between Horney's view of optimal functioning and the view of Rogers?

6.9 Implications and applications

What was Horney's contribution to psychotherapy, female psychology, research, measurement and the interpretation and handling of aggression?

6.9.1 Psychotherapy

As is the case with most of the psychoanalytical theories, Horney's theory is to a large extent the outcome of her own psychotherapeutic work. For her, the goal of psychotherapy is to bring about a realistic relationship between the ideal and the actual self in order to enable people to accept themselves as they are and to set realistic goals for the future. Such people will be released from the tyranny of shoulds and feel free to acknowledge their mistakes as well as their successes.

The therapeutic process that removes the growth-blocking factors is long and difficult because neurotic people will do everything in their power to protect the ideal self.

Horney sees the therapeutic relationship as an interpersonal relationship that represents a broadening of the person's relationships with others. As such, the therapeutic relationship offers people a platform from which they can practise freeing themselves from their fixation within one interpersonal style.

She maintains that the therapist's role in the therapeutic relationship should be active and directive and that the therapist should offer advice and suggestions openly and honestly. It is only when the therapist assumes a directive role that the therapeutic relationship can be used to make people aware of their fixation within a specific interpersonal style, and to bring them into contact with their actual selves.

To the horror of therapists who believed that 'the analyst's couch and the laborious pursuit of buried meanings were the very soul of therapy' (Hausdorf, 1972:30), Horney sought to shorten the long duration of psychotherapeutic treatment. Moreover, she was a fervent advocate of *self-analysis*, to the extent that she even took this as a title for one of her books (Horney, 1942).

Example

Hostile types might start therapy with the hope that it will sweep away whatever is preventing them from increasing their power base and strengthening their dominating stance. They are intent upon trying to actualise their idealised self, whereas the therapist is trying to replace the idealised self with the actual self and bring them into contact with their true potentialities.

6.9.2 Contribution to female psychology

Horney criticises Freud's concepts of penis envy and castration anxiety as arising from male prejudice. In her work on female psychology, (*Feminine Psychology*, published posthumously in 1967), she clearly contrasted the patriarchal view of the ideal woman with a more modern view, in which female identity is more than just the reflection of a male ideal. She discards the notion that women's sole purpose is to give birth and raise children, and be at the mercy of men for love, prestige, care and protection. These views played an important role in stimulating subsequent feminist movements and in the development of *female psychology*.

6.9.3 Measurement and research

Horney's theory is based mainly on case studies. Like Freud and Jung, she did not keep verbatim records of her sessions with patients, because she felt that taking notes would distract her attention from the therapy itself. Although she tried to be meticulous and scientific in her clinical observations, her database consisted of reconstructions of therapy sessions. Consequently, much of the criticism levelled against the theories of Freud and Jung – that they lack objective verification – also applies to her views.

Although, Horney's work initially generated little research, there seems to be a renewed interest to investigate the usefulness of her three neurotic types (i.e. compliant, aggressive and detached) in the understanding of personality and personality disorders. Coolidge, Moor, Yamazaki, Stewart and Segal (2001) developed the *Horney-Coolidge Type Inventory* (HCTI) as a measure to assess Horney's three neurotic personality types, with follow-up studies determining the construct validity of the HCTI (Coolidge, Segal, Benight & Danielian, 2004) and the

establishment of the psychometric properties of a child and adolescent version of the HCTI (Coolidge, Segal, Estey & Neuzil, 2011). These studies provide confirmation of the applicability and usefulness of Horney's tripartite theory of personality and personality disorders. A study by Robinson and Wikowski (2006) supports Horney's notion on how intrapsychic conflicts relate and determine interpersonal styles.

6.9.4 The interpretation and handling of aggression

Horney (1939) divides Freud's views into two distinct categories: those she sees as based on subjective, imaginative speculation, and those based on his experience and observation of his patients. She rejects Freud's notion of unconscious hostile, aggressive and destructive impulses arising from a death drive, because she believes it to be based on no more than subjective speculation. She feels that this idea falsely implies that people live to destroy, rather than that they will destroy only in order to stay alive.

Horney acknowledges the existence of hostility and aggression, but she does not attribute them to a death drive. She believes that people may respond with hostility and aggression if their survival is threatened (for instance, a mother will fight to protect her child) or if they are frustrated or insulted; in other words, human beings will become aggressive if their physical well-being or their values are threatened.

Horney believes that people are not inherently destructive. She points out that Freud's acceptance of a destructive death drive opens up the dangerous possibility that people may be relieved of any sense of responsibility or guilt for their destructive or aggressive impulses. This then may have the consequence that people may fail to acknowledge the true reasons for their destructive or aggressive behaviour.

Horney (1939:132) also maintains that attributing all behaviour to repression of the death drive, as Freud does, has negative implications for cultural anthropology:

It must lead anthropologists to assume that whenever in a culture they find people friendly and peaceful, hostile reactions have been repressed: Such an assumption (also) paralyzes any effort to search in the specific cultural conditions for reasons which make for destructiveness. It must also paralyze efforts to change anything in these conditions. If man is inherently destructive and consequently unhappy, why strive for a better future?

Apart from viewing aggression as a response to frustration rather than as a drive, Horney also sees aggression and hostility as the neurotic reactions of people whose interpersonal styles involve *acting against people*. In her view, aggression should therefore be handled by identifying – at a conscious rather than an unconscious level – the direct and immediate causes of the aggressive behaviour. In a recent study based on Horney's linkage between interpersonal styles and aggression, Pinto, Maltby, Wood & Day (2012) found that individuals measuring high on authenticity respond less aggressively to attacks or counter-attacks in unfair situations.

The aggression and hostility of people who move against others can be handled by helping them, through therapy, to become less fixated in that interpersonal style.

Self-evaluation questions

- What is the goal of psychotherapy, according to Horney?
- How do Horney and Freud differ in their view of aggression?

6.10 Evaluation of the theory

Horney's most important contribution lies in the insights she provides, as an experienced psychotherapist schooled in the psychoanalytical tradition, into the functioning and dynamics of the neurotic personality. Her influence is particularly evident in Carl Rogers' concept of the self and in Albert Ellis' rational-emotional therapy. She also stimulated interest in *Feminine Psychology* through her rejection of Freud's demeaning view of women, and replacing it with a positive theory of femininity.

Hausdorff (1972) points out that Horney is criticised for oversimplifying complex phenomena and for popularising psychoanalysis by stooping to 'lending-library psychoanalysis'. Such critics maintain that, by making social adjustment and self-actualisation accessible to the lay middle class through self-analysis, she allowed these to become fads.

Enrichment

Although it seems as if Horney's theory does not attract much attention in courses at university, there is, however, a society that promotes and centres around her work.

- *International Karen Horney Society*

The aim of this society is to bring people interested in Horney's theory and work in touch with one another, and to keep members informed of developments in Horney's theory and Horney's research. (plaza.ufl.edu/bjparis/ikhs/).

Self-evaluation question

- Horney's theory seems not to attract much attention nowadays. Is this justified or not? What are your views regarding her contribution to the understanding of the functioning and behaviour of people?



Erich Fromm
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Erich Fromm

6.11 Background

How did Karl Marx influence Fromm's thinking and can his views rightly be classified as a personality theory?

Erich Fromm (1900–1980) was born in Frankfurt the year Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* was published. He studied psychology, sociology and philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. After receiving his doctorate in 1922, he studied psychoanalysis at the Berlin Psychoanalytical Institute. In the late 1920s

he joined the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt where he helped to establish the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute. In 1933 he emigrated to America where he initially lectured at the Chicago Institute of Psychoanalysis and subsequently started a private practice in New York. Later he lectured at several universities, including those of Columbia, New York, Michigan State and Yale, and he was the founder of the Mexican Psychoanalytical Institute. In Chicago he renewed his friendship with Karen Horney, whom he had met in Berlin. Fromm became a member of Horney's American Institute for Psychoanalysis, but because Fromm had no medical schooling he was not accepted as a full member of the Institute, and consequently he established the William Alanson White Institute.

Fromm's psychoanalytical approach was deeply influenced by the writings of Karl Marx. His *humanistic psychoanalysis* (Fromm, 1986), which revolves around the relationship between the individual and society, is to a great extent a synthesis of Freud's and Marx's theoretical positions, adapted to Western capitalistic society. Fromm was not interested in Marx's political and economic theories as such, but in his social and philosophical views as it is reflected in his book *Marx's Concept of Man* (1980). He is sometimes incorrectly regarded as a Marxist because of his view that capitalism has a negative effect on the individual's natural development. He himself points out, however, that to be against something does not necessarily imply being in favour of something else. Fromm does not deny Marx's influence on his thinking but prefers to describe himself as a *dialectical humanist* and to promote the 'renaissance of humanism' (Fromm, 1980:262). Fromm (1976a:263) is also very critical of Marx's one-sided view of an individual's functioning, stating that Marx did not:

... sufficiently see the passions and strivings which are rooted in man's nature, and in conditions of his existence, and which are in themselves the most powerful driving force for human development.

His main theme is people's struggle to retain their worth and freedom in spite of society's pressure to conform, which threatens to alienate and isolate them.

Fromm's theory is more a general philosophy of humanity than a personality theory in the true sense. His views have more relevance for humanity in general than for the unique individual person. As a result, his views may easily be misinterpreted from a personological perspective as abstract, irrelevant and unverified, although his classifications of interpersonal styles and character types actually have important implications for the understanding of individual functioning.

Enrichment

- Dr CG Boeree (2006) provides a concise overview of Erich Fromm's life and theory. (<http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/fromm.html>)

Self-evaluation question

- How would you describe and classify Fromm's theory?

6.12 The view of the person underlying the theory

Why can Fromm's view of the person be described as sociobiological and dualistic?

In a publication that appeared after his death, Fromm (1992) objected to the widespread notion that his view of the person was *anti-biological* or *non-biological* and *sociocultural* because he did not subscribe to Freud's views on drives and the libido. Fromm pointed out that his objection was not to the biological basis of the libido theory, but to the mechanistic, physiologically biased world view in which the theory was anchored, which made no provision for needs that were purely human and devoid of a biological basis.

Burston (1991) agrees that Fromm's theory has often been misinterpreted, and he blames this partly on Hall and Lindzey's (1954; 1957; 1978) influential book on personality theory, in which Fromm is classified as an 'environmentalist' who denies the influence of heredity. According to Burston (1991:171)

... this is simply a misreading. Fromm always emphasized the importance of innate disposition. Personality, for Fromm, consists of a combination of the innate and the acquired – or in his own terminology, of 'temperament' and 'character'.

Fromm sees the human being as *dualistic*, with both an animal and a human nature. Being animal, human beings have certain physiological needs (sex, hunger, thirst, etcetera) which make them subject to the physical laws of nature. However, as the only animal having *self-consciousness*, *reason* and *conscience*, people also have purely human needs that separate them from their natural existence. Because of their human nature people are able, as ethical and rational beings, to transcend their instinctive animal nature. As human beings their behaviour and needs are more controlled by their conscience than by their instincts.

KEY TERMS

existential dichotomies:
insoluble conflicts inherent in human existence

historical dichotomies:
conflicts inherent in human existence that can be overcome

An important issue for Fromm is that individuals must actualise their human natures by transcending their animal natures and they must confront the **existential** and **historical dichotomies** inherent in their human existence. Fromm (1986:41-49) defines existential dichotomies as the insoluble conflicts inherent in human existence to which individuals can react in various ways according to their characters and culture, while historical dichotomies are conflicts that can be overcome or discarded.

Example

Examples of existential dichotomies are:

Over and above the human-animal dichotomy, other existential dichotomies are life-death or individual-society. People are the only animals who, due to their self-consciousness, are aware of their own possibilities and limitations, including the fact that they must die. The pain of being human is also closely bound up with the fact that people want to be individuals, free of all bondage, yet also want to escape from loneliness and isolation by committing themselves to their fellows and to society. There is thus a conflict between individual and society that can be resolved only through balancing the demands for each. As Christian teaching would have it, this means 'to love your neighbour as you love yourself'.

Example

Examples of historical dichotomies are:
The unequal distribution of wealth with poverty as its antithesis; the fact that war is undertaken in the name of peace, or that there is discrimination against some people even though all people are essentially equal by virtue of their human nature.

According to Fromm, people's basic motivation is to be found in the management of the dichotomies of human existence (animal versus human nature; individual versus society). As he puts it (1976a:25):

The necessity to find ever-new solutions for the contradictions in his existence, to find ever-higher forms of unity with nature, his fellow men and himself, is the source of all psychic forces which motivate man, of all his passions, affects and anxieties.

Fromm's starting point is the assumption that people are alike in that they must all confront the same inherent existential and historical dichotomies, being in this respect quite unlike animals. It is not his intention to deny people's diversity as expressed in differing personality attributes, but to emphasise the uniqueness of people in comparison with animals.

Self-evaluation question

- Discuss Fromm's sociobiological and dualistic view of the person and note the influence of Marx and Freud on his thinking.

6.13 The structure of the personality

Like Karen Horney, Fromm pays little attention to the structural components of the personality, and is far more interested in its dynamics as manifested in the interaction between people and their society.

What are the basic human processes that Fromm construes as structural components of the personality?

Fromm does not accept Freud's division of the personality into the structural elements of the id, ego and superego. He does, however, regard Freud's identification of conscious and unconscious levels of functioning as one of the most important points of departure in human behaviour. His emphasis with regard to the conscious, however, is upon *self-consciousness* (the process whereby people are conscious of the fact that they are conscious) as the attribute that distinguishes people from animals. This self-consciousness leads Fromm to regard people as a 'creation's joke', because it is self-consciousness that makes people aware of their existential and historical dichotomies.

Fromm identifies two purely human processes that are offshoots of self-consciousness and that direct and control human behaviour. These are *reason* and *conscience*.

- Human **reason** enables people to transcend their animal nature and deal with the dichotomies of their existence. According to Fromm (1986), reason is both a blessing and a curse. A person is continuously trying to solve the dichotomies of life that cannot be solved. Reason is applied in an effort to cope with these dichotomies of life and to create a world in which an individual feels comfortable with him- or herself and with other people.
- Human **conscience** is a regulating agent of the personality, which enables the person to evaluate his or her own behaviour according to established norms and values. Fromm (1986:141–172) distinguishes between an *authoritarian* and a *humanistic conscience*.

KEY TERMS

authoritarian conscience:

external authority that directs and controls individual behaviour

humanistic conscience: an individual's 'inner voice'

- The **authoritarian conscience** is 'the voice of an internalised external authority', such as parents, state or society, which directs and controls the individual's behaviour.
- The **humanistic conscience**, by contrast, is the person's own 'inner voice'. Fromm (1986) views the humanistic conscience as a response of a person's personality as a complete functioning or dysfunctioning human being, not as a response of certain dimensions that make up a person's being.

The humanistic conscience determines whether or not the person is behaving in accordance with his or her true human nature (as represented in the basic *human needs*) and it encourages growth. Conversely, the authoritarian conscience inhibits personality development because it detracts from the individual's freedom and forces him or her to conform. Fromm (1986) is of the opinion that the humanistic conscience has to do with the maintenance of a person's self-interest and integrity. Authoritarian conscience, on the other hand, relates to a person's sense of obedience, obligation, self-sacrifice and adjustment to the social environment.

This view is not an elevation of individual norms and values at the expense of the norms and values of society; it is an attempt to show that a society may well be unhealthy and that its norms and values run counter to true human nature. Fromm (1986:50) identifies an *inherent* and a *learnt* component of the personality, and he describes personality as the result of inherent and learnt psychic characteristics, which uniquely distinguishes one person from another person.

KEY TERMS

temperament: behavioural responses that are constitutionally determined and cannot be changed

character: behavioural component of the personality that is shaped by personal experience and socialisation and can be changed

What are the inherent and learnt components of the personality according to Fromm?

Fromm (1986:52) equates the difference between inherent and learnt personality attributes to the difference between **temperament** and **character**. He describes temperament as behavioural responses that are constitutionally determined and cannot be changed. Character, however, has to do with the behavioural component of the personality that is shaped by personal experience and socialisation and can be changed to some extent as the person acquires new experiences and insights. Character is the 'social component' of the personality which, because of socialisation, reflects society's influence.

Example

The response pattern of people with *choleric temperaments* is described as ‘quick and powerful’, but what they respond to and how they respond is determined by their characters. Thus someone with a choleric temperament and a productive character would be capable of intense love, would react vehemently to injustice and would be immediately impressed by a new idea. By contrast, someone with a choleric temperament and a sadistic character would be quick and powerful in his or her destructive and cruel behaviour and aggressive outbursts. (Fromm, 1986:52)

The human character system, says Fromm (1986:59), is a substitute for the instincts, which he says direct and determine animal behaviour only. He defines character as a more or less set way in which humans channel their energy when they adapt to and interact with other people.

In contrast with Freud, who explains human behaviour in terms of a biologically deterministic foundation localised in the libido organisation of the id, Fromm sees a social determinist foundation localised in the individual’s character. According to Fromm, an individual’s character is created by the various ways in which he or she relates to the world, unlike Freud’s phases of libidinal development with its sublimations and reaction formations. (Funk, 1982:19).

Fromm (1976:78) uses the concept **social character**, which he describes as:

... the nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture, in contradistinction to the individual character in which people belonging to the same culture differ from each other.

According to Fromm, the social character has an overriding effect on the individual character. For him, the orientation and traits shared with others exercise a decisive role in the formation of the individual character structure and the ‘individual can only live as a social being’. Thus, the understanding of the individual character presupposes the understanding of the culture and society of the individual (Funk, 1998:222–223).

Self-evaluation questions

- Describe the basic human processes which, according to Fromm, are the offshoots of self-consciousness and which direct and control human behaviour.
- What does Fromm understand by the concepts ‘temperament’, ‘character’ and ‘social character’?

6.14 The dynamics of the personality

Because Fromm draws a distinct line between animal nature (whose behaviour is directed by instincts) and human nature, what does he consider to be the driving force behind human behaviour?

Fromm does not regard people as being at the mercy of their instincts, as Freud does. He attributes individuals’ behaviour to specific **human needs** that arise out

KEY TERM

social character: the core of the character common to most members of a culture

KEY TERM

human needs: needs which develop as a result of people’s separation from nature

of their existence as human beings, and to individuals' characters, which cause the needs to be expressed in particular ways. Fromm (1976a:viii) is of the opinion that:

... the basic passions of man are not rooted in his instinctive needs, but in the specific conditions of human existence, in the need to find a new relatedness to man and nature after having lost the primary relatedness of the pre-human stage.

6.14.1 Human needs

What are the basic human needs, according to Fromm?

Fromm (1976a:27–66) distinguishes five human needs, which he believes represent the true nature of humanity. They develop as a result of people's separation from nature and reflect their dichotomous being. These needs are the need for *relatedness*, the need for *transcendence*, the need for *rootedness*, the need for a *personal identity* and the need for a *frame of reference*.

The need for relatedness

Human beings have a need to belong to someone or something. This need arises because human beings do not enjoy the primary unity with nature that is characteristic of animal existence. People experience their separation from nature as loneliness and isolation, and they seek to restore the broken unity by entering into relationships with their fellow human beings. Fromm (1976a:30) regards the need to unite and associate with other people as 'an imperative need of the fulfilment on which man's sanity depends'.

Unity with others can take place in a destructive way if people try to *dominate* other people (a *sadistic relationship*), or when they *submit* themselves to others (a *masochistic relationship*). Either way, these people remain in a relationship of dependency with the people whom they dominate or to whom they subjugate themselves – in other words, in both types of relationship individuality and freedom are inhibited (Fromm, 1976a:31).

Unity with others can, however, be accomplished in a constructive way through **love**. Fromm believes a relationship can be productive only if it is characterised by *mature love*. He defines love as follows (1976a:31–33):

... a union with somebody, or something, outside oneself, under the condition of retaining the separateness and integrity of one's self. It is an experience of sharing, of communion, which permits the full unfolding of one's inner activity ... In the experience of love the paradox happens that two people become one, and remain two at the same time ... In the experience of love lies the only answer to be human, lies sanity.

Love, regardless of whether it is maternal or paternal love, erotic love, brotherly love, self-love or love of God, is distinguished by respect, understanding, responsibility and caring. Fromm points out that self-love in the sense of self-respect, self-responsibility, self-understanding and self-caring is a productive orientation, which is the opposite of selfishness. Selfishness is a kind of narcissism and is destructive.

People who are unable to enter into any relationship are trapped in their own narcissistic existence. *Narcissism*, as the obverse of love and reason, is found in all forms of pathology. In many forms of pathology people do not satisfy the need to relate, because they withdraw from reality and become absorbed in a 'world of their own' (Fromm, 1976a:36).

The need for transcendence

People have the need to transcend their natural, instinctual existence by *creating* or *destroying*. Through the act of creation, people transcend themselves from their instinctive nature into a purposeful and free existence displayed as love, in art and a productive lifestyle. According to Fromm, human beings engage in destructive behaviour when their need to create something productive is blocked. Like all living organisms, human beings can create life, but the human being is the only organism that can consciously give life and take it away (for instance, only human beings can consciously practise family planning, or consciously commit murder or suicide).

KEY TERMS

benign or benevolent aggression: an inherent programmed impulse geared at self-protection

malignant or malevolent aggression: aggression that becomes an end in itself

He differentiates between two destructive forces, namely **benign aggression**, which is a phylogenetically programmed impulse geared at self-protection, and **malignant aggression**, where aggression becomes an end in itself. Fromm (1973) describes malignant aggression as being specifically human as it did not exist in the animal world, and although malignant aggression was not necessary for man's survival, it was an important part of some individuals and cultures.

Fromm's interpersonal view of aggression is clearly different from Freud's drive-based biological view. Fromm's view of aggression is discussed in greater detail in 'The interpretation and handling of aggression'.

The need for rootedness

This is the need to be protected and to form part of a historical past. At birth the protective shield of the womb is forsaken and growing up means to leave the protective environment of the mother. People, then, continue to yearn lifelong for the security and safety of their pre-birth existence. Mature adults exhibit this need for rootedness and a sense of identity in the importance they attach to the unity of the family, community within the church, identification with the state (nationalism and patriotism) or a sporting team, and the worship of a god.

The need for a personal identity

According to Fromm (1976a:60), human beings can be 'defined as animals who are able to say 'I' and who are aware of themselves as separate entities'. The need for a personal identity develops after the bondage with the mother is broken and replaced by an awakening self-awareness and a sense of being a distinct person, identified as 'I'. The need for an identity reflects people's need to know themselves and determine their place in society as free, unfettered individuals.

Fromm maintains that modern Western society can provide people with the opportunity to develop their full individuality – but only under a truly democratic dispensation. Under such a dispensation they would be free of any political authority or economic deprivation that might curtail their freedom. Even for Fromm, though, such a dispensation remains an ideal rather than a possible reality.

The need for a frame of reference

The fact that people have reason, conscience and imagination does more than distinguish them from animals, it necessitates their search for their own identities. It also enables them to orientate themselves within the world and give meaning to their existence within a specific frame of reference.

The need for a frame of reference may differ in content and from person to person and from one society to the next. According to Fromm (1976a:65), the most common frames of reference include the following:

- *Primitive systems* such as animism and totemism, in which natural objects and the influence of the ancestors give meaning to people's lives.
- *Nontheistic systems* such as Buddhism and Hinduism, in which there is no specific concept of a deity, but which do involve a general philosophy of life.
- *Monotheistic systems* such as Christianity or Islam, involving a specific concept of God, in terms of which people can orient themselves and direct their lives.



According to Fromm, organised religion creates an important frame of reference
Source: Fotolia: 6324645, Fotolia: 94176636, Fotolia: 98995120, Fotolia: 64359927

6.14.2 Needs and character

Do people express basic human needs in different individual ways?

Individuals differ in their expression of their human needs. The specific character type of an individual will determine whether the different needs are expressed constructively or destructively. By virtue of their *self-awareness*, *reason* and *conscience*,

all people have the potential to actualise their needs in a constructive or a destructive way. They can choose whether to lead a healthy and productive life and develop their human potential, or to ‘escape’ from their human freedom by submitting themselves to another person (a *masochistic relationship*) or trying to force someone else to submit to them (a *sadistic relationship*). Choosing to use their freedom by realising their needs in a productive life orientation is painful for people, but ultimately fulfilling.

Choosing to escape from their freedom in exchange for the temporary security offered by submission to something or someone, or by holding something or someone in thrall, is ultimately counter-productive and destructive to their basic human nature. To preserve spiritual health, people must be in productive relationships with other people.

Self-evaluation questions

- Discuss the human needs that Fromm regards as representing the true human nature.
- What is the main difference between an animal nature and a human nature, according to Fromm?

6.15 The development of the personality

Emphasising the sociobiological and human nature (as opposed to the animal nature) of the person, how does Fromm perceive the development of personality?

In his formulation of the developmental process, Fromm does not give as much attention to stages of development or the principles of personality development as Freud did. Instead, he focuses on the unique social and cultural conditions that affect character development and the satisfaction of basic human needs. He also emphasises the development of socially determined character types, which are a product of the social character. He describes the social character as ‘... the nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture’ (1976a:78) and claims that the content of the social character is determined by the structure of society and the functioning of the individual within that social structure.

Fromm (1986:58–59) maintains that character develops in the two ways in which a person experiences his or her environment, namely *assimilation* and *socialisation*. Assimilation refers to the person’s unique, individual experiences in association with his or her environment, and socialisation refers to the experiences of parents and community that are transmitted to the child. Both processes are at the core of the acquired component of the personality, namely the character.

How does the parent–child relationship influence a person’s development of his or her character?

According to Fromm (1986:107–112), there are three types of relationship that parents (or the community) may form with children in the course of their socialisation, namely a *sympiotic relationship*, a *withdrawing–destructive relationship*,

or an *ideal parent-child relationship*. Each of these relationships leads to a specific character type in adulthood.

- Fromm maintains that in a **sybiotic relationship** between parents and a child, the parents ‘swallow up’ children by ‘buying’ their intimacy and closeness, or children ‘swallow up’ the parents by exploiting them and manipulating them to satisfy their every whim. In both cases the child cannot achieve full independence. When children are excessively dependent on their parents, they will develop a *receptive character type* in adulthood, while a manipulative relationship will lead to an *exploitative character type*.
- The **withdrawing-destructive relationship** is characterised by a great distance between parents and child. Such a relationship is created by parents who deny the child’s individuality by subjugating him or her to their own will at all costs (even to the point of violence). This arouses a sense of powerlessness in the child, who copes by becoming either indifferent and withdrawn or assertively destructive. The child who copes through indifference and withdrawal develops a *marketing character type* in adulthood, whereas the one who responds with assertive destructiveness develops the *hoarding character type*.
- Fromm (1986) sees the **ideal parent-child relationship** as characterised by love, which he describes as a ‘productive form of relatedness to others and to oneself’. This involves taking responsibility and showing consideration for oneself and others. It entails being sensitive to the needs of others, showing consideration, really knowing them well and wanting them to fulfil their potential. When children have received love from their parents and have learnt to love themselves and others, they will develop a productive interpersonal style in adulthood, as is manifested in the *biophilous character type* (Fromm, 1973:406).

What are the character types distinguished by Fromm?

Although Fromm maintains that assimilation and socialisation lead to the development of an *individual character*, he is also of the opinion that different character types can be distinguished among individual characters on the basis of certain common properties. But these character types must be treated as ‘ideal types’ and not as a description of the character of an individual (Fromm, 1986:61).

Fromm’s views on character types are not consistent throughout his writings and he does not always clarify the variations in his thinking. One distinction that he does make from the outset is between a *non-productive orientation* and a *productive orientation*, which are interpersonal styles that underlie the different character types.

- **Non-productive orientation** refers to behaviour that involves the surrender of a person’s freedom and integrity through excessive individual needs or social demands. It is characterised by narcissism, selfishness, conformity, dependence and irrationality.

- **Productive orientation** refers to behaviour directed towards the actualisation of the individual's potentialities without giving up his or her freedom or integrity. An individual can surrender his or her freedom or integrity through compulsive and excessive need satisfaction or through conforming to excessive social demands. The productive orientation is distinguished by love, generosity, creativity, independence and rationality.

Fromm identifies the following character types within the non-productive and productive orientations:

6.15.1 Non-productive orientation

Fromm identifies five characteristics within the non-productive orientation.

Receptive character type

Such people believe that everything that is good and satisfying lies outside them and beyond their control. They have learnt only to receive, not to give. They have intense feelings of dependence and desperately need to be loved, but are unable to truly love anyone or anything other than themselves. They will develop strongly masochistic relationships with other people, preferring to be the 'slave' rather than the 'master'. This character type bears similarities to Freud's *oral-incorporating* type and Horney's category of the person who *moves towards others*.

Exploitative character type

These people believe that the source of satisfaction lies outside themselves and that they have the right to use others for their own gratification. They do not have qualities like empathy, making 'biting' remarks about other people, and they want to dominate their fellow human beings for their own gain through manipulation. Such people tend to develop intensely sadistic relationships with others, since they seek to be the 'master' in all respects. They take pleasure in forcefully acquiring things that do not belong to them. According to Fromm, they fear situations that require spontaneous, original responses – in fact, they fear everything that is not certain and predictable. Such people are basically scared of life, and they deal with their fear by acting cruelly and destructively towards others.

Fromm analyses the behaviour and personalities of, among others, Joseph Stalin and Heinrich Himmler as case studies of the sadistic character type. This character type corresponds to Freud's *oral-aggressive* type and Horney's category of the person who *moves against others*.

Hoarding character type

These people have little belief or trust in the world outside themselves, and want to keep themselves and what they have intact without having to make much contact with the world outside. They are basically mistrustful and stubborn, and inclined to be excessively tidy and orderly because this is the only way they can deal with the world and protect themselves from being invaded by the 'dirty' world outside.

Stubbornness is a logical reaction to any attempt by others to intrude into their private space. Orderliness represents an attempt to keep the world in its proper place as a means of avoiding threat from the outside world. Their security mainly stems from hoarding and saving, while spending is experienced as a threat. Fromm (1973) typifies Heinrich Himmler, ‘the bloodhound of Europe’, as an anal-hoarding type. This character type corresponds to Freud’s *anal-retentive* type and Horney’s category of the person who *moves away from others*.

Marketing character type

This character type is for Fromm the direct product of modern technological society, which teaches people to offer their personalities as commodities on the ‘personal market’. Such people believe that they must present themselves on the personality market as other people (‘the buyers’) would like to experience them (‘buy’). With the loss of self-esteem and a self-identity, marketing character types change their personalities according to the principle: ‘I am as you desire me’ (Fromm, 1986:73).

People with marketing orientations have little genuine interest in the welfare of other people, treating others as ‘objects’ to be used for their own selfish purposes. As a consequence, marketing relationships are characterised by indifference.

Necrophilous character type

Fromm (1973) added this type at a later stage and it largely corresponds to Freud’s *anal* type. Such people believe that behaving cruelly and aggressively is the only way of operating. Fromm (1973) describes the necrophilous character type as someone who is passionately attracted to everything that is dead and decayed and who wants to destroy all living structures.

Racists, terrorists, warmongers and people who enjoy torturing and abusing others are, by and large, necrophilous character types. They usually worship technology and their approach to the world is intellectual and without any feeling. According to Fromm, Hitler may be regarded as an exploitative type, but also as the prototype of a necrophilous character type.

6.15.2 Productive orientation

Fromm identifies only one character type within the productive orientation, namely the *biophilous character type* (Fromm:1964;1973). These are people who love life and want to relate to other people from a position of productive love. This character type is concerned with personal growth by attaining freedom and independence of control by others, and applying their reason and imagination in the development of the self. They are capable of mature love and try to influence others by love and reason and not through power. Fromm (1986:110) defines love as ‘the productive form of relatedness to others and oneself’, which ‘implies responsibility, care, respect and knowledge, and the wish for the other person to grow and develop’. They come closest to the Christian ideal of loving your neighbour as you love yourself.

The website below provides a link to a video, *Erich Fromm – Our personality package*, in which Fromm talks about the marketing orientation and social relationships.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FvGNLBXDMg>)

They direct their lives according to the demands of reason and a humanist conscience in an attempt to realise their full inherent potentialities.

Ryckman (1993:169) states that:

The biophilous orientation is extremely difficult to attain, because it requires discipline, a willingness to be fully open to experiences, and above all, to be responsive and open-minded to what is alive and creative in others and try to look past their failures.

In a recent study, Adler (2009) developed a reliable measure of a biophilous orientation. His findings did not, however, verify Fromm's view that reward and cooperation as productive orientations will increase levels of biophilia and reduce levels of destructive aggressive behaviour. He argues that the relationship between biophilia, cooperation and aggression is more complex and should take frustration as a mediated factor into account.

For Fromm, this character type represents the optimal development of the personality. With this character typology, Fromm shifts the emphasis away from Freud's position of biologically determined personality types based mainly on different types of libido organisation to character types that are socially determined.

Two modes of existence

In his book, *To have or to be* (1976b), Fromm proposed two modes of existence as guiding principles in a person's life, identifying it as the 'having mode' (a non-productive orientation) and the 'being mode' (a productive orientation).

The *having mode*, which is based on greed and aggression, focuses on what the person possesses, be it material possessions (i.e. houses, cars, books, etcetera), people or intangible things such as ideas or faith. The desire to own somebody or something, and the unlimited right to keep what is acquired, is the main driving force in such a person. Such individuals' self-worth comes from outside and their identities are defined in terms of possessions and what they could gain from any situation. They live according to the motto: 'I am what I possess'.

Although the *being mode* is more difficult to define, Fromm maintains that it is rooted in love and is concerned with shared experience and productive activity. People guided by this mode are not competitive; the main driving forces are sharing and cooperation based on love. Such people's self-worth comes from within and their identities are defined in terms of what they *are*, and not in terms of what they *have*. This mode of existence corresponds to Fromm's biophilous character type.

Fromm believes that there is a preponderance of the having mode in modern society, and he argues that only a fundamental change from a having mode to a being mode of existence can save the world from a psychological and economic catastrophe (1976b:165).

Enrichment

Video: *To have or to be?*

Fromm discusses his book, *To have or to be*, and the implications of these two modes of existence for people and modern society.

(Can be retrieved from: Erich Fromm – You Tube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzpT1mZf718>

Activity

Decide which of Fromm's socially determined character types most aptly reflects your society. Try and find appropriate examples amongst the people you know to illustrate it. Where would you classify yourself according to Fromm's character types?

Self-evaluation questions

- What are the three parent–child relationships identified by Fromm, and which character types are associated with each of these relationships?
- Provide an outline of Fromm's socially determined character types and point out the similarities and differences between these and Freud's biologically determined personality types.

6.16 The optimal development of the personality

With the prominent role that Fromm ascribes to the influence of the society on an individual's functioning, how did he envisage the optimal functioning of a person and psychopathology?

Optimally developed people, for Fromm, are spiritually healthy and have productively-oriented lifestyles; they are representative of the *biophilous character type* and are guided by the *being mode* of existence. They are consequently not estranged from themselves and their potentialities. They display a loving and sharing relationship with others, and live productively with other people and their environment. They live in the present, participate fully in life and experience themselves as one with themselves and society. Fromm (1976a:275) describes this sort of person as someone:

... who relates himself to the world lovingly, and who uses his reason to grasp reality objectively; who experiences himself as a unique individual entity, and at the same time feels one with his fellow man; who is not subject to irrational authority, and accepts willingly the rational authority of conscience and reason; who is in the process of being born as long as he is alive, and considers the gift of life the most precious chance he has.

According to Fromm, optimal development of a healthy personality can take place only in a *healthy society*. This would be one which nurtured healthy personality development and in which people – not some economic or political arrangement – would occupy the centre court and would not be exploited by others. Avarice, exploitation, possessiveness, narcissism and the like would have no place in such a social structure. On the contrary, in such a healthy society the individual would be expected to act in accordance with his or her conscience and opportunistic behaviour would be rejected as asocial and unprincipled. Fromm (1976a:276) adds:

A sane society, furthermore, is one which permits man to operate within manageable and observable dimensions, and to be an active and responsible participant in the life of society, as well as the master of his own life. It is one which furthers human solidarity and not only permits, but stimulates, its members to relate themselves to each other lovingly.

The accomplishment of optimal development, says Fromm, is generally frustrated by the fact that society is sick. For example, in *The Sane Society* (1976a) he points to the inability of the ‘sick’ communist and capitalist societies to achieve an optimal balance between individual and society. The communist structure advances society’s needs at the cost of individual needs, while the capitalist structure advances the individual’s needs at the cost of society’s.

6.17 Views on psychopathology

Like Horney, Fromm sees only a gradual difference between psychological health and pathology. Unlike Freud, who attributed psychopathology to *intrapsychic conflicts*, and Horney, who traced it back mainly to *interpersonal relationships*, Fromm believes psychopathology is caused by the *sociocultural properties of society* that work against a person’s true nature. Neurosis develops when productive innate healthy drives (i.e. love, care and to live productively with other people) are blocked by parental or societal demands. A sick society, he maintains, will produce sick people, while a healthy society will produce healthy people (Fromm, 1976a).

This view influenced his approach to psychotherapy to some extent, and he stressed the reconstruction of society rather than individual psychotherapy. In other words, he proposed a kind of ‘social therapy’ aimed at producing the ‘new healthy person’ in a ‘new healthy society’. According to him, the aim of psychotherapy is to replace non-productive orientations with productive orientations. This implies that a psychologist should understand the neurotic character and the societal conditions in order to bring about change.

Self-evaluation question

- Discuss the role that society plays in Fromm’s view of optimal functioning and psychopathology.

6.18 Implications and applications

Did Fromm's theory have any significant implications for psychological measurement and research at all?

6.18.1 Measurement and research

Fromm did not use quantitative research methods to verify his theoretical views; instead, he used qualitative methods based on the *historical method*. He formulated his theoretical constructions of human personality and behaviour on the basis of his observation and interpretation of human functioning, in particular cultural and historical contexts (including contemporary case studies and historical figures and/or events). This historical method involves the analysis of the influence and effect of social structures and political, economic, sociological and anthropological factors on human behaviour. Fromm (1973:363–67) made use of case histories to verify the necrophilous character.

Fromm and Maccoby (1970) conducted an extensive field study among Mexican villagers and found sufficient confirmation of his character types. All character types except the marketing type were found among the villagers. The village's alcoholics were all found to have receptive character types, in accordance with Fromm's description of this type of person as prone to addictions. The exploitative type was found among the village's first modern entrepreneurs, who had destroyed many of the village's traditions through their capitalist orientations in addition to exploiting and economically enslaving its workers. The necrophilous character type was found among those who physically attacked and viciously criticised family members. By contrast, villagers with productive lifestyles had democratic and traditional values. They showed the necessary deference for figures of authority, and as parents they treated their children with love and respect.

In a study among American business managers, Maccoby (1976:92) found confirmation of Fromm's marketing type, which he referred to as the 'company man'. Like Fromm's marketing type, these people try to create the right impression by 'selling' themselves. According to Maccoby (1976:92), they are '... constantly working on themselves in order to have the right kind of personality to fit the job'. In later studies, Maccoby (1981; 1988) identified two additional character types in the American business world, namely the self-oriented and the self-developing types. Although this research did not validate Fromm's basic character types, the findings correspond to his general view that personality types develop and change along with historical, social and cultural conditions.

Maccoby (2003; 2007) developed an interpretative interview and survey instruments to determine a person's social character and personality, and he identified another character type, the productive narcissist. He also applied Fromm's theory of social character to the study of leadership and followership, proposing that 'social character is the internalized culture which is formed in childhood to enable to adapt to the demands of work and social patterns in that culture' (Wikipedia, 2015).

Enrichment

Michael Maccoby trained as a psychoanalyst with Erich Fromm and conducted several research programmes in collaboration with Fromm. Today he is a recognised expert on leadership and he established and is president of *The Maccoby Group*, which offers consulting, coaching and leadership workshops. (Can be retrieved from: The Maccoby Group)

www.maccoby.com

6.18.2 The interpretation and handling of aggression

Did Fromm apply his distinction between animal and human nature to his view of aggression?

Fromm (1986; 1973) devoted considerable time and attention to the pathogenesis of aggression and destructive behaviour, and his views underwent several successive refinements. Initially he (1949) distinguished only between *reactive* or *rational hatred* (subsequently referred to as *benevolent aggression*), as a biological response to actual or imagined threats, and *irrational character-conditioned hatred* (subsequently termed *malevolent aggression*). Fromm (1986) defined reactive or rational hatred as a response to something that threatens a person's freedom, life or beliefs. It is based on the principle that life should be respected. The biological response of rational hatred is an action to preserve life and not to destroy life.

Reactive or rational hatred occurs in animals as well as in humans, and does not have destruction as its primary objective. Character-conditioned hatred, by contrast, is a primarily destructive trait that is found only in humans. Fromm (1986) describes this as an inherent feeling within a person to be antagonistic towards other people. It is not a reaction to an outside trigger. It is something that is entrenched in a person's character. Irrational hate is aimed at other people as well as at oneself. The latter is usually based on rationalisation of a person being unselfish and willing to forego certain things, or self-blame, self-denial and feelings of inferiority.

While Freud attributes destructiveness to the instinctive energy deriving from the libido, which is present in all people, Fromm maintains that although reactive or rational hatred occurs in all people and has a biological basis, the incidence and intensity of character-conditioned hatred differs from person to person and from culture to culture. Character-conditioned hatred represents a secondary potentiality of human functioning, which appears when the primary potentiality for growth and development has been thwarted by unfavourable environmental conditions. Fromm (1986) explains that the natural tendency is for a person to grow and if a situation occurs that hinders this process of growth, the energy that should have been used for growth is changed into a negative energy that is aimed at destroying life and this is often the source of malicious and destructive actions.

Hence this type of hatred develops in environmental conditions that block the satisfaction of basic needs, particularly those for transcendence (creation and destruction). Fromm (1976a:38) states the following in this regard:

Creation and destruction, love and hate, are not two instincts which exist independently. They are both answers to the same need for transcendence, and the will to destroy must rise when the will to create cannot be satisfied. However, the satisfaction of the need to create leads to happiness; destructiveness to suffering, most of all, for the destroyer himself.

In Fromm's (1973) monumental work on aggression, *The anatomy of human destructiveness*, the two types of hatred are referred to as *benign* or *benevolent aggression* (a phylogenetically programmed self-protective impulse) and *malignant* or *malevolent aggression* (a human potentiality created by conditions of human existence, with destruction as its sole objective).

Benign or benevolent aggression includes all aggressive behaviour that does not have destruction as its explicit purpose. In this category, Fromm also distinguishes between the following:

- *pseudo-aggression*, for example accidents, aggression in sports, and assertive behaviour
- *defensive aggression*, for example attempts to eliminate threats to one's safety, freedom or human dignity
- *conforming aggression*, when aggressive behaviour occurs at the behest of a higher authority
- *instrumental aggression*, for instance wars, in which the aggression is not a goal in itself, but a means to a political or economic end.

Fromm believes that benevolent aggression should be handled by identifying and controlling the actual threatening conditions that cause it. For instance, if unfavourable living conditions cause one group or individual to dominate and threaten the freedom of another, these should be identified and eliminated.

Malignant or malevolent aggression, in which aggression is a goal in itself, occurs mainly among necrophilous and exploitative character types who have a strongly sadistic orientation. This type of aggression is not biologically based; it stems from a character structure formed through assimilation and socialisation.

People who have this type of character are usually power-hungry and believe that problems can be solved only through violence. Their approach to the world is intellectual and devoid of feeling, and according to Fromm, they idolise technology (for example nuclear weapons, which brought humanity to the edge of extinction). Fromm discusses Adolf Hitler's personality and behaviour in a detailed case study, in which he sees Hitler as someone whose malevolent aggression stems from his exploitative and necrophilous character type.

Since malevolent aggression is not an innate response to threat; it may be handled by creating social conditions in which human needs can be fully satisfied through

productive rather than non-productive orientations. Fromm (1973:380–398) also values reason above intelligence, since only rationality can save human beings from the path of death and destruction followed by necrophilous character types.

Activity

Determine how Fromm's views on aggression could be used to counteract some of the crime and violence in modern day society. Apply his views to problems such as rape, hijacking, homicide and child abuse that mark present-day living conditions.

Self-evaluation question

- Discuss Fromm's two types of aggression and the implications of each type for human functioning.

6.19 Evaluation of the theory

In addition to Fromm's theoretical views on the influence of society upon human functioning, he also pays attention to the role of religion in specific societies and its influence on a person's *social character* (Fromm, 1976b:133–164).

His theory is criticised by the behaviourists, in particular, as subjective philosophical speculation because his views have not been quantitatively verified. They have also not been verified through observations drawn from a clinical practice, as is the case with Horney. His theory rests mainly upon his own critical analysis of social structure and human nature as it arises in his own life by means of the historical method, and the reciprocal influence he postulates between social and individual functioning.

Despite the lack of empirical verification, Maddi (1989) maintains that Fromm's description of character types is extremely clear and comprehensive. He gave a more detailed description of the characteristics and inclinations than most other theorists. He was the only theorist who actually attempted to list the characteristics that make up the character types he studied, thereby providing a basis for further empirical verification.

Fromm's numerous publications are highly popular among the lay public all over the world. This is consistent with one of his goals, namely to write as accessibly as possible by avoiding the unnecessary use of specialist terminology.

Schultz and Schultz (2005:191) summarise Fromm's contribution to personology as follows:

Fromm presented us with a unique interpretation of the interaction between humanity and society ... Whether or not his specific interpretations turn out to be valid, he has shown us that a human being is not the exclusive product of a single set of forces but the result of an interplay of forces and events. He has challenged us to think beyond the boundaries of any one discipline and has consistently goaded us to evolve a newer humane society, pointing out the consequences of not doing so.

The legacy of Fromm is mainly preserved by the work and dedication of Rainer Funk, the author of two comprehensive books about the life, theory and ideas of Fromm: *Erich Fromm: The courage to be human* (1982) and *Erich Fromm: His life and ideas* (2000). Funk was an associate of Fromm in the last years of his life and is the literary executor of Fromm's estate. He was also instrumental in establishing the *International Erich Fromm Society*.

Enrichment

The *International Fromm Society* is a website with the aim of maintaining Erich Fromm's scholarly findings, writings and ideas through research, publications and conferences.

www.fromm-gesellschaft.eu/index.php/en/

Video: Erich Fromm: The Mike Wallace Interview

In this video, Fromm talks to Mike Wallace about society, materialism, relationships, religion and happiness.

(Can be retrieved from: *Harry Ransom Center*)

www.hrc.utexas.edu/multimedia/video/2008/wallace/fromm_erich.html

Self-evaluation question

- What is Fromm's unique contribution to personology?

6.20 Suggested reading

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Chapter 7

The ego psychological theory of Erik Erikson (1902–1994)

Henning Viljoen & Werner Meyer

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KEY TERM

ego: aspect of the personality which makes co-ordinated and planned functioning possible

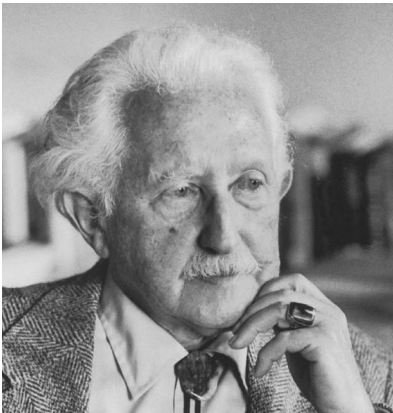
7.1 Outcomes

- Understand why Erikson is typified as an **ego psychologist** and what is implied by **ego psychology**.
- Know how Erikson's **life experiences** influenced his theory and how his theory differs from Freud's.
- Grasp the important role Erikson ascribes to the **ego** and the problem of **identity**.
- Understand Erikson's **epigenetic principle** and how this genetically determined ground plan in interaction with **social factors** determines the development of personality.
- Explain Erikson's **eight stages of development** which cover the total lifespan.
- Evaluate Erikson's **contribution** to personology.

7.2 Background

Why did ego psychology develop?

Freud, who introduced the concept **ego** to psychology, regards the ego as that part of the personality that has to satisfy id drives while minimising feelings of guilt. Thus, although the ego can be described as the executive power of the personality, Freud still regards it as being subservient to the demands of the id and the superego. In his later works, Freud seems to have assigned a somewhat larger role to the ego than he did in his earlier works (Hartmann, Kris & Loewenstein, 1946).



Erik Erikson
Source: Corbis: TS001668

This line of thought, whereby the ego became more empowered, was continued and elaborated upon by a group of theorists known as *ego psychologists*, whose work represents one of the most important developments in post-Freudian psychoanalytical thinking. Heinz Hartmann (1894–1970), who is regarded as the father of ego psychology, agrees with Freud's view that the ego has the function of both resolving the conflict between the id and superego, and of helping the individual to cope with external reality (Hall, Lindzey, Loehlin & Manesovitz, 1985:72 & 74). However, he differs from Freud in making the ego less dependent on the id, by assuming that the ego is not dependent on the id for energy as Freud did. Hartmann therefore assigns a far more important and independent role to the ego than Freud did, referring in this regard to a conflict-free ego sphere (Hartmann, Kris & Loewenstein, 1964).

KEY TERM

ego psychology: school of thought stressing the independent functioning of the ego

Other prominent names started to emerge in this school of thought, such as Henry Murray, Anna Freud, Robert White and Erik Erikson (Hall *et al.*, 1985; Maddi, 1989). They all conceptualise the ego as an independent part of the personality, which not only deals with conflicts between the id and the superego, but has its own sources of energy and initiates behaviour in its own right. According to Ryckman (1993:184) **ego psychology**:

... represents the systematic extension and liberalization of Freud's view of the role of the ego in personality functioning ... Ego psychology emphasizes the integration of biological and psychosocial forces in the determination of personality functioning.

This chapter focuses on the thinking of Erik Erikson (1902–1994), one of the most modern and well-known ego psychologists who put forward a clear theory of an independent ego.

Who was Erik Erikson and how did he become a psychoanalyst?

Erik Erikson's background is rather extraordinary for a world-famous academic (Roazen, 1976). He himself says that experiences such as those he lived through in his youth should bring on a serious *identity crisis* (Erikson, 1975). Although his parents came from Denmark, he was born in Germany. His parents separated before he was born, and when he was three years old his mother married a German–Jewish paediatrician, Theodor Homburger. It was only years later that Erikson discovered that Homburger was not his own father. When he left school, he travelled on foot through various European countries, whereafter he was trained at a number of art schools. He was apparently an alienated young man and it is possible that his later interest in the identity problems of adolescents and the coining of his famous concept, the identity crisis, stemmed from his own experiences.

In 1927, while studying in Vienna and teaching part-time at a school for Americans, he encountered some of Freud's followers. A little later he began training in psychoanalysis and underwent personal analysis with Anna Freud. It was this training and contact with Anna Freud that stimulated his interest in childhood development and the importance of sociocultural influences on personality. In 1933, because of the anti-Semitic activities of the National Socialists, he and his wife Joan emigrated to America where he initially opened a private practice as a child psychoanalyst in Boston. Later he became a respected academic meeting anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, as well as psychologists such as Henry Murray and Kurt Lewin who had a profound influence in shaping his ideas. He published a number of articles and contributed chapters to various books, but his first independent book, *Childhood and society*, was published only in 1950, when he was 48 years old. His last book about old age, *Vital involvement in old age*, written in collaboration with his wife and a third author, was published at the age of 84 (Schultz & Schultz, 2005; Hall *et al.*, 1985.)

How did Erikson's life experiences influence his theory?

Several characteristics of Erikson's work are possibly related to his own experiences:

- One of these characteristics is the special interest in the problem of **identity**, and is probably due to the fact that he had severe identity problems of his own. Initially he grew up not knowing about his biological father, which made him unsure of his name and real identity later on in life, together with the fact that his whole childhood was spent in Germany although his parents

KEY TERM

identity: a person's image of him- or herself

were Danish. He wrote several leading works on the adolescent's search for identity (Erikson, 1959; 1963; 1968; 1974). He also wrote extensively on the development of prominent people who had serious struggles with their own identities: Martin Luther (Erikson, 1958), Adolf Hitler (Erikson, 1969), George Bernard Shaw (Erikson, 1968), Mahatma Gandhi (Erikson, 1969) and Thomas Jefferson (Erikson, 1974). He called these psychological studies of historical figures *psychohistory*.

- It is also of note that he writes repeatedly about the *influence of society* on individual development, not only in his books on human development (Erikson, 1959; 1963; 1968; 1974), but also in numerous other writings on non-Western cultures (for example the Yurok and the Sioux in 1963), and also in his speculations about modern technological society (1974).

Although Erikson had been trained in psychoanalysis and was at pains to emphasise the similarities between his theory and Freud's, there are some major differences between them. For example, his well-known theory on human development differs from Freud's in several important respects. Erikson contends that the development of personality continues throughout life and that at each stage people can rectify spontaneously whatever problems may have arisen in the course of their development. Freud sees development as mainly irreversible. Roazen (1976) believes that Erikson minimised his departures from Freud's theory because he feared a clear statement of disagreement might have been insulting to the teacher he admired.

Self-evaluation questions

- What is ego psychology and how did it develop?
- Discuss how Erikson's life experiences are reflected in his theory.

7.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

As a trained psychoanalyst, how does Erikson's view of the person compare with Freud's?

It is not easy to determine Erikson's basic view of the person because, while he writes within a Freudian framework, he also differs widely from Freud. His view of the person is probably best understood in contrast to Freud's.

According to Freud, the individual has *drives* that inevitably conflict with the norms of society. Life therefore consists basically of the effort to satisfy as many of these drives as possible while minimising clashes with society and guilt feelings. Erikson makes few references to drive satisfaction, conflict between society and the individual and guilt feelings. He views the person more positively as a being with a variety of needs, potentials and possibilities, all of which are accepted and supported by society.

According to Freud, *personality development* is determined by certain biological, intrapsychic and interpersonal processes during the first five or six years of life,

KEY TERM

epigenetic principle:
individual characteristics
emerge at certain ages in
a particular, genetically
determined sequence

and is completed at about six years of age. In contrast, Erikson believes that the human being's development consists of the progressive and lifelong evolution of the individual's innate potential according to the **epigenetic principle**. Although the broad trend of this development is automatic, its particular detail is determined by the specific challenges and possibilities that the social environment makes available to the individual, while the success of development depends on the nature and quality of the individual's interpersonal relationships. Erikson also believes that the ego plays a role in determining the detail and the success of this development. In contrast with Freud, Erikson therefore allows for lifelong development and for a degree of personal freedom and he also ascribes a greater role to social influences on development than Freud did.

In Freud's view, there is an inevitable and continuous *conflict* between the individual and society because of the human being's basic nature, but for Erikson the relationship between the individual and society is complementary.

On the basis of this comparison, it seems that Erikson's view of the person is more compatible with the views of humanistic psychologists such as Rogers and Maslow than with Freud's psychoanalytic view. Although Erikson does not specify a motive fundamental to humanity, as most person-oriented theorists do, there is sufficient evidence in his theory to allow the following interpretation. The basic motive of human beings is:

- to develop their inherent potential
- to know and accept themselves and their possibilities
- to know that they can feel at home with these characteristics and potentialities in their social environment.

Although individuals may not be aware of it, this underlying basic motive manifests itself in automatic and lifelong progression from one stage to the next. It also manifests itself in lifelong efforts to know oneself and to achieve congruence between one's self-image and the social aspects of one's life (such as membership of groups and acceptance by others). These ideas are embodied in Erikson's concept of 'identity', which is explained in detail in Erikson's view of the development of personality.

Self-evaluation question

- How does Erikson's view of the person differ from Freud's view and can he, strictly speaking, be classified as a psychoanalytical theorist?

7.4 The structure of the personality

Although Erikson accepts Freud's view of personality structure, it is difficult to assess precisely how important these structural concepts are for understanding Erikson's theory. This difficulty is increased by the fact that Erikson often pretends to be Freud's orthodox disciple and that his theoretical contribution is no more than a mere interpretation of Freud, while in fact he deviates substantially from his mentor.

How does Erikson's view of the structure of personality correspond to or differ from Freud's view?

The thinking of Freud and Erikson on the structure of personality is similar in that both see personality as including a kind of executive agent (namely the ego), as well as two other agents or protagonists (namely the id and the *superego*). They differ in that the structural concepts play a much lesser role in Erikson's theory than in Freud's. Although Erikson sometimes uses the terms id, superego and ego, he does so mostly when recounting Freud's thinking in an historical context (1963:192–194), or when he criticises his contemporaries for interpreting Freud too literally (1968:143). In his own explanations of human functioning and development, the terms id and superego hardly ever appear. He does, however, often use the term ego, but in a far wider sense than Freud.

Freud and Erikson also differ in their explanations of the collaborative functioning of the id, ego and superego, and in the way they define them in relation to one another and the social environment. Freud draws clear distinctions: the id, superego and ego are described as independently functioning units of personality which almost possess the character of complete individuals. He also clearly distinguishes between the individual and the environment. Erikson does not offer such clear distinctions. Rather than treating the id, the superego and the ego as three parts of the personality, he simply distinguishes between the drive element (id), the moral element (superego) and the planning and executive element (ego), of the overall functioning of the person.

Erikson, furthermore, does not draw a sharp distinction between the person and the social environment but describes them as being intertwined (Erikson, 1968:224):

One can only conclude that the functioning ego, while guarding individuality, is far from being isolated, for a kind of communality links egos in a mutual activation. Something in the ego processes, then, and something in social processes is – well, practically identical.

So, while Erikson does not reject Freud's structural concepts, namely of id, superego and ego, he uses the terms only to describe aspects of the human being's overall intrapsychic functioning and not to refer to parts of the person. The only one of Freud's terms that he uses regularly is the ego.

How does Erikson conceptualise the ego?

The ego, according to Erikson, is that aspect of the personality that makes co-ordinated and planned functioning possible (Erikson, 1968:218) and he describes it as:

... the domain of an inner 'agency' safeguarding our coherent existence by screening and synthesizing, in a series of moments, all the impressions, emotions, memories, and impulses which try to enter our thought and demand action, and which would tear us apart if unsorted and unmanaged by a slowly growing and reliably watchful screening system.

He accordingly defined the ego as a person's 'capacity to unify his experience and his actions in an adaptive manner' (Erikson, 1963:16).

For Freud, the ego acted as mediator between the demands of the id, the superego and the external world and he did not pay attention to the development of the ego, whereas Erikson emphasised the social and cultural development of the ego and the development of ego strengths (Feist and Feist, 1998). According to Erikson, the ego develops throughout life, governed by a genetically determined ground plan (the *epigenetic principle*) which causes certain characteristics of the ego to come to the fore in a predetermined sequence. Yet it should be remembered that the demands and opportunities of the social environment play a determining role in the way the ego develops. Through the continuous interaction between individual and social environment, the individual experiences a series of so-called *crises*, points at which the ego must make choices about its future development. The ego in Erikson's theory is therefore not only an executive officer trying to mediate between the id and the superego – as in Freud's theory – but also an agent that chooses among different developmental possibilities and tries to find solutions for developmental crises in a creative way. When development is progressing successfully, the ego acquires characteristics (*ego strengths*) such as hope, will-power, trustworthiness and the ability to love and care. (These are explained in more detail in Erikson's view of development of the personality.)

Self-evaluation question

- Compare Erikson's view of the structure of personality with that of Freud and explain the role Erikson ascribes to the ego.

7.5 The dynamics of the personality

What, in Erikson's view, motivates people?

There are two problems in explaining Erikson's view of the dynamics of personality. Firstly, he seldom uses dynamic or motivational concepts. What he does say about the motivation of behaviour and human functioning is interwoven with his explanation of the developmental process. Secondly, as previously mentioned, he purports to be an orthodox Freudian but in reality differs rather drastically from Freud. He does not explicitly reject Freud's drive theory which proposes that behaviour is the result of energy derived from sexual and aggressive drives. Physical energy concepts, however, do not play a significant role in his theory. He rather sees behaviour as the outcome of broad inherent developmental tendencies and behaviour patterns which are transformed into specific personality traits through interaction with the social environment (Schultz & Schultz, 2005). Erikson's explanation of the origin of behaviour is closer in many respects to the person-oriented psychologists than to Freudian psychology (Roazen, 1976:63).

Reasons might be presented to regard the *striving for identity* as Erikson's version of a person's basic motive. However, even this central concept of Erikson's theory is more related to development than to motivation, and will therefore be discussed in more detail later.

7.6 The development of the personality

Erikson is particularly well known for his theory on human development, in which he identifies eight stages of development covering the total lifespan. To understand his thinking on the stages of development it is necessary to have a clear idea about his thoughts on the *basic principles of development*, his conception of *developmental crises, modes and rituals*.

7.6.1 The basic principles of development

What are the basic principles of development, according to Erikson?

According to Erikson, individual development is the result of two simultaneous and complex influences, namely *genetic* and *social factors* (Schultz & Schultz, 2005).

Genetic factors determine development through the manifestation of characteristics that develop according to a *genetically determined ground plan*. He explains this plan by means of the *epigenetic principle*, a concept that he derives from biology. According to this principle, the individual's characteristics (including potentials and needs) emerge at certain ages and in a particular, genetically determined sequence, but in such a way that the person constantly develops as a whole (Erikson, 1959:52; Roazen, 1976:108). The principle implies that development takes place in both visible and unobtrusive ways. While one specific trait or developmental theme dominates the developmental scene at any particular age, changes are occurring simultaneously in all other areas of the individual's personality. If we take the area of physical development as an illustration of this, the teeth provide a good example of how the epigenetic principle works. A baby's teeth become visible only when they pierce through the gums several months after birth. They have been developing imperceptibly long before this, however, and continue to do so, according to a genetically determined pattern.

According to Erikson, the epigenetic principle is valid for all aspects of development, including behaviour and personality attributes. This means that each personality characteristic is continually developing even though the development may not be evident at a specific age, and each trait must change constantly because of the changes in other parts and traits of the personality. Just as the baby's teeth start growing long before they become visible, so aspects of the personality, such as cognitive abilities and social skills, are busy developing all the time even when there is no overt evidence of their development.

Social influences are present, in that society makes certain demands on the individual and at the same time offers certain opportunities for growth. These demands and opportunities are in accordance with, and are complementary to, the developmental potential and needs of the individual at each stage of development. For example, society expects six-year-old children to start acquiring certain skills, and simultaneously gives them the opportunity to do so through schooling.

Table 7.1 The epigenetic chart according to Erikson

Source: From *Childhood and society* by Erik Erikson. Published by Vintage. Reprinted with permission of The Random House Group Limited.

Stage										Ego strengths
Maturity									Integrity vs despair	Wisdom
Adulthood									Generativity vs stagnation	Care
Early adulthood	Trust vs. distrust in respect to spouse	Maintain autonomy in relationship	Master new roles in family	Learning new responsibilities, in family and career	Reformulate identity as married person	Intimacy vs isolation	Family planning; starting a career	Developing joint philosophy and values		Love
Adolescence					Identity vs confusion					Trust – worthiness
School age				Identity vs inferiority						Competence
Play age			Initiative vs guilt							Purpose
Early childhood		Autonomy vs doubt								Will-power
Infancy	Trust vs distrust									Hope

The diagonal running from bottom left to top right indicates development through the lifespan, with the names of the eight stages. Early adulthood is explained in more detail; the crises of the other stages are worked through again, although intimacy versus isolation is at the forefront.

Erikson asserts that personality development takes place in eight stages ranging from birth to old age. At each stage a certain aspect of the personality emerges as the focal point of development, while other aspects continue to develop ‘below the surface’ according to the epigenetic ground plan. Table 7.1 provides an overview of the epigenetic process of development.

7.6.2 Developmental crises

What, according to Erikson, is a developmental crisis?

KEY TERM

developmental crisis:

a crisis arising from the interaction between genetic development and social influences

Each developmental stage is characterised by what Erikson calls a **developmental crisis** arising from the interaction between genetic development and social influences. The needs, possibilities, expectations and opportunities which emerge in each stage invariably demand a choice between two opposing developmental possibilities. Erikson calls this choice between two possibilities a *developmental crisis*, and the possibilities each stage offers are implicit in the names Erikson has given them. The first stage, for example, is called *basic trust versus mistrust*, indicating that in the first year the child learns to regard the environment either with trust or with mistrust (or, to put it differently, the crisis of choosing between trust and mistrust must be solved).

KEY TERM

ego strength: a positive personality trait emanating from the solution of a developmental crisis

The developmental possibilities should not be seen as *mutually exclusive opposites* but as *complementary opposites*. The ideal solution to each developmental crisis is therefore found in a healthy balance between the two extreme possibilities. According to Erikson, an **ego strength** (also known as *psychosocial strength*, *basic strength*, *ego virtues* or *developmental gain*) emanates from the solution of each developmental crisis. Ego strengths can generally be regarded as the positive personality traits that humanity can develop as a species. Erikson (1964) postulated that ego strengths are inherent, instinctual and internal strengths gained by healthy individuals. The development of ego strengths depends on the internal preparedness and successful completion of associated psychosocial crises and it also requires a unique interdependence between a person and the social environment (Freeman, 2001:32–37).

Erikson describes ego strengths as those characteristics that qualify and prepare individuals for their roles in the generation cycle, that is the development of society from generation to generation (Erikson, 1982:55). For example, the ego strength which flows from the developmental crisis *trust versus mistrust* is the quality of hope, which is a necessary trait for the continued existence and progress of any culture. The same is true of all the ego strengths: society benefits when its members possess them.

It is interesting to note that the solution to a developmental crisis is not achieved by excluding one of the opposites, nor merely by some form of compromise between the two. It is attained through a synthesis that includes both opposites, although the positive pole always seems to carry more weight than the negative. This synthesis (ego strength) thereby enables the individual to advance to a higher level of development.

7.6.3 Modes: Organ modes and psychosocial modalities

What does Erikson mean by ‘organ modes’ and ‘psychosocial modalities’ and what are the roles of these concepts in his developmental theory?

KEY TERMS

modes: an umbrella term referring to organ modes and psychosocial modalities

organ modes: pre-genital forms of behaviour such as sucking, biting and defecating

psychosocial modalities: general behaviour patterns emanating from the organ modes

Erikson’s (1963) concept of **modes** plays a major role in his theory. He uses it chiefly in his description of development during the first six years of life, but it has a function in his explanation of all the stages. Certain physical behaviour patterns in children (**organ modes**) correspond in broad detail with a wide range of psychosocial and cognitive behaviour patterns in adults (**psychosocial modalities**), and it may therefore be concluded that the adult behaviour patterns grow out of the earlier behaviour patterns of children. Erikson thus attempts to explain complex adult behaviour in terms of similar but simpler behaviour of the child.

In Erikson’s model, the first six years of a child’s life (the period which Freud calls the pre-genital stage) are characterised by behaviour patterns such as sucking, biting and defecating, which are related to specific needs. These pre-genital forms of behaviour, which Erikson calls *organ modes* (so named because they are the manner in which specific bodily organs function), gradually form the basic pattern for a large variety of general behaviour forms, which Erikson calls *psychosocial modalities* (Erikson, 1963:66–67; 1982:34). For example, the organ mode of sucking is the prototype for psychosocial modalities such as endearment, friendliness and captivating behaviour, as well as cognitive behaviour such as the absorption of knowledge. While the organ mode of sucking serves the intake of food, the related psychosocial modalities have the function of ‘taking in’ people, love and knowledge.

Erikson uses the term *modes* as an umbrella term to refer both to *organ modes* and *psychosocial modalities*, and regards these modes as the most important link between the child’s psychosexual development and psychosocial and cognitive development throughout life. The concept of modes is therefore central to Erikson’s theory.

Which modes are distinguished by Erikson?

Erikson (1963) distinguishes between three modes that to a lesser degree correspond to some of Freud’s psychosexual stages of development, namely the *mode of incorporation*, the *mode of expulsion* and the *mode of inclusion and intrusion*.

The mode of incorporation

The first mode Erikson discusses is incorporation, which predominates during the first year of life. The dominant bodily zone is the mouth, and in this respect the stage corresponds with Freud’s *oral stage*. While Freud places the emphasis squarely on the psychosexual aspect of the baby’s oral behaviour, Erikson’s interpretation is much broader.

The forms of behaviour associated with taking in food (sucking, biting, etc.), according to Erikson, are the patterned precursors and patterns of a series of other forms of incorporation. The organ mode ‘incorporation of food’ is therefore the prototype for the psychosocial modality of incorporation. All forms of incorporative behaviour, such as receiving and ‘taking’ with the hands, eyes, mind and emotions, follow the pattern of food intake. The attitudes and feelings that the infant learns to associate with incorporative behaviour during the first year of life therefore have a great influence on all later incorporative functions.

The developmental crisis of the first stage (*basic trust* versus *mistrust*) implies that infants must decide, on the basis of experience, how far they can trust their environment to provide them with whatever they need to satisfy the demands of their incorporative behaviour. This implies not only their need for food, but anything else they can ‘get’ with their eyes, hands or intellect. In this way the psychosocial modality of incorporation, together with the way the child solves the crisis of *trust* versus *mistrust*, determines much of his or her lifelong functioning. It will determine the nature of their contact with the physical environment, their interaction with people, their views of the world and their attitudes towards knowledge and cognitive functioning.

The mode of expulsion

During the second year of life the expulsion mode emerges, which initially is linked to the anal body zone. Once again, despite some similarities with Freud’s *anal stage*, Erikson’s view is broader. He describes how children acquire a degree of muscle control that enables them to exert more control over their own lives than before. The acquisition of socially acceptable toilet habits, together with the required muscle control, provide children with the first and clearest proof of their newly discovered abilities. The anal functions (that is, the organ modes) of excretion and retention of excreta become the prototypes for a variety of psychosocial modalities. The modality of holding on or letting go is connected with holding on to things and people, with protection, with holding on to something against others’ wishes in order to dominate them, with letting things happen passively and with unleashing destructive forces onto the world (Erikson, 1982:36).

The implication here is that the way children learn to control their muscles during their second year, and the attitudes and feelings they learn to associate with that control, all exert a great influence on various forms of behaviour.

The mode of inclusion and intrusion

From third to the fifth year, that is, the period that Freud connects with the sexual organs and especially the phallus, is characterised by the modes of inclusion and intrusion. (Erikson’s ideas here are not particularly clear but it seems that, like Freud, he is referring to children’s sexual fantasies about their sexual organs.) Although the sexual organs are extremely important body zones in this phase, these organ modes have a much wider foundation, namely the child’s increasing

ability to move and co-ordinate movements. Children can now take far more initiative than before and can therefore ‘make’ and ‘do’ much more than they could previously (Erikson, 1982:37). They therefore also have more opportunity to do things that are against social rules and that can arouse feelings of guilt.

The associated psychosocial modalities are aggressive forms of intrusion and the passive form of inclusion. The aggressive forms imply (Erikson, 1982:37):

... a variety of configurationally ‘similar’ activities: the intrusion into space by vigorous locomotion; into other bodies by physical attack; into other people’s ears and minds by aggressive sounds; and into the unknown by consuming curiosity.

The more passive forms of inclusion apply to the following (Erikson, 1982:37):

... a quiet, if eager, receptivity in regard to imaginative material and a readiness to form tender and protective relations with peers as well as with smaller children.

Erikson points out that both modes of behaviour appear in boys and girls and that cultural factors determine whether the aggressive mode is more evident in boys and the passive mode more prominent in girls (Erikson, 1963; 1982). These modes are prototypes for various forms of social behaviour such as interpersonal relations and sexual behaviour.

7.6.4 Rituals and ritualisation

What does Erikson mean by a ‘ritual’ and what role does it play in development?

KEY TERM

ritualisation: a pattern of actions that is repeated more or less exactly under certain circumstances

Each development stage is characterised by one or more **ritualisations**. A *ritual* is a pattern of actions that is repeated more or less exactly under certain circumstances. For example, dogs who always sniff one another on meeting, or penguins who greet each other by a complex series of stereotyped behaviours, which includes necking, light pecking, dancing and making a lot of noise. Erikson (1977) believes that such rituals are instinctive to particular animal species and that they also have an instinctive foundation in humans. The rituals that can be observed in human behaviour, however, are determined mainly by culture and often have a playful character. For this reason he calls them ritualisations. Ritualisation allows people to express their feelings and urges in an acceptable way, and provides them with some degree of security in a continually changing world.



The ritual greeting between a mother and her baby

Source: Fotolia: 100641503

During the infant stage the prominent ritualisation is the interaction that takes place each morning between mother and infant. This interaction consists mainly of eye contact, hugging, stroking and kissing, accompanied by the repetition of the baby’s name or endearments, various gestures and making sounds which, in other circumstances, would be undignified for the mother to make. The infant responds with intense staring, smiling and cooing (Erikson, 1966a; 1977:86–92; Hall *et al.*, 1985:90).

The second year of life is characterised by the child's ritualisation of punishment and reward, like when the parents and child playfully scold one another or when children at play assume the disciplinary role of parents. Such ritualisations possibly serve the function of working through parental approval or disapproval of the children's behaviour, for example during toilet training, an important phase in the development of the superego (Erikson, 1977:94).

During the so-called play age (approximately three to five years), children use a great deal of dramatic ritualisation, for example, in games of the imagination, which teach them to see things as other people might see them, and to look at situations and events from different points of view (Erikson, 1977:101). That is why children of this age love to play-act, taking on different roles and wearing adult clothes. During the school years formal ritualisations play an important part in the educational process (Erikson, 1977:103–106). Through repetition of formal behaviour patterns, children learn how to speak to teachers and other figures of authority, and are prepared for the adult ritual of work. Erikson does not specify any rituals derived from given ritualisations for later developmental stages (Hall *et al.*, 1985:91).

7.6.5 The eight stages of development

When studying these stages of development, it should be remembered that each stage has a developmental crisis as a nucleus, and that development is governed by the epigenetic principle. This implies that each developmental crisis emerges at genetically determined ages and in a fixed sequence, and must be worked through afresh during each stage in terms of the individual's total development at that point.

The holistic character of development has two important implications. Firstly, unsuccessful resolution of a crisis at any stage complicates the handling of ensuing crises, while successful resolution makes it easier to deal with later crises. Secondly, an individual who has not satisfactorily resolved the crisis of one stage always has the opportunity to do so at a later stage. In this way Erikson makes provision for the spontaneous recovery of developmental problems, and gives his theory as a whole a much more optimistic tone than Freud's.

What, according to Erikson, are the eight developmental stages that cover the total lifespan?

Infancy: Basic trust versus mistrust: Hope

Development during this stage covers the first year of life and is characterised by the developmental crisis **basic trust versus mistrust**. Development focuses on the organ mode of the mouth and the intake of food, which forms the basis of the psychosocial modality of *incorporation*. Initially the infant takes in food passively but later, when teeth start to appear, in a more active and aggressive way. There are, therefore, passive and aggressive forms of psychosocial incorporation.

The extent to which infants learn to trust their environment depends mainly on the quality of the mother–child relationship (Erikson, 1963:249):

Mothers create a sense of trust in their children by that kind of administration which in its quality combines sensitive care of the baby's individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness within the trusted framework of their culture's life style. This forms the basis in the child for a sense of identity which will later combine a sense of being 'all right', of being oneself and of becoming what other people trust one will become ... Parents must not only have certain ways of guiding by prohibition and permission; they must also be able to represent to the child a deep and almost somatic conviction that there is a meaning to what they are doing.

The successful resolution of the crisis of this stage is children's acquisition of a healthy trust in the world and themselves: faith that their environment will satisfy their needs for food, love and attention and also that they are able to satisfy their needs within their cultural environment. However, healthy trust is not naive or blind, but is tempered with a degree of distrust, which leads to caution. Erikson calls this ego strength *hope*.

Early childhood: Autonomy versus shame and doubt: Will-power

This stage, which covers approximately the second year of life, is characterised by the developmental crisis **autonomy versus shame and doubt**. The prototypical organ mode of this stage is the anal functions of retention and excretion, which enable children to experiment with two psychosocial modalities: *holding on* and *letting go*. At this stage, children want to exercise and develop their new-found muscle control, an ability which leads them either to autonomy (if they perform successfully) or shame and doubt about their abilities (if they perform unsuccessfully).

Erikson's perception of this stage emerges from his advice to parents. They should, he says, encourage their children to stand on their own two feet while protecting them from unnecessary failure and from feelings of inadequacy and doubt about their abilities. Children should be allowed to exercise autonomy, but not too much should be expected of them because too many failures will induce shame and doubt about their abilities.

A healthy solution to this crisis is the development of the ego strength of *will-power* – that is, the ability to make independent choices and exercise self-control. (Erikson, 1963:254) describes the importance of this stage as follows:

This stage, therefore, becomes decisive for the ratio of love and hate, co-operation and wilfulness, freedom of self-expression and its suppression. From a sense of self-control without loss of self-esteem comes a lasting sense of goodwill and pride; from a sense of loss of self-control and of foreign over-control comes a lasting propensity for doubt and shame.

The play age: Initiative versus guilt: Purpose

This stage embraces the third to the sixth year and is characterised by the development crisis **initiative versus guilt**. The prototypical organ mode of this stage is the child's increasing independence of movement and the eroticisation of the genitals. What emerge are the psychosocial modalities of *intrusion* and *inclusion* (or endearment, in the sense of attracting people by making oneself attractive). Children at this stage can act on their own initiative, and can therefore feel guilty about their behaviour.

Children experience conflict between their abilities to intrude into other people's lives (through their ability to move about, to speak and produce noise, and through their sexual fantasies) and their new-found realisation of moral rules, which are encouraged by their identification with the parent of the same sex.

Erikson (1963) believes that at this stage the children psychologically become rudimentary parents, in their readiness to adopt and apply rules and their eagerness to care for younger children. This stage is therefore exceptionally important in the development of the conscience. The danger of this stage is that the conscience will develop too strictly or in a moralistic way. The ideal resolution of the crisis lies in finding a balance between the childlike enthusiasm for doing and making things and the tendency to be too strict in self-judgement. Erikson calls this ego strength *purpose*.

The school age: Industry versus inferiority: Competence

This stage covers the ages six to twelve and is characterised by the developmental crisis **industry versus inferiority**. Children have by now mastered the various organ modes and learn to gain recognition by producing things. They develop a sense of industry, learn to handle the tools of their culture and become keen collaborators in any productive process. Society meets these tendencies of children by creating opportunities for learning and co-operation. In a modern technological society this is a prolonged and complex process of formal schooling directed at the acquisition of basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic. In traditional societies, the children have more direct opportunities of learning the skills and habits of their culture by observing and participating in activities.

The danger of this stage is that children may fail to acquire the skills and tools of their culture, which causes feelings of inferiority to develop. A healthy balance is reached through the ego strength of *competence*, in other words, the development of a sense of proficiency or competence, which is one of the conditions for participating successfully in the cultural processes of productivity and, later, to be able to maintain a family.

Adolescence: Identity versus role confusion: Reliability

This stage starts with the onset of puberty at about twelve, and ends with the beginning of early maturity (which could be anywhere between the 18th and 25th year, depending on the culture and the duration of training required for the individual's vocation). It is characterised by the developmental crisis **identity versus role confusion**. The physical changes of puberty, the onset of sexual maturity and the social expectation that adolescents have to make a career choice, all force the individual to re-examine earlier certainties. It is, therefore, important that adolescents should ask the following questions: 'What am I in the eyes of other people?'; 'How do images that people have of me correlate with my self-image?'; and 'How can my previously acquired roles and skills fit into the career world and my projected future?' (Erikson, 1963:261).

Erikson calls this quest for a self-image *continuity in life* and congruence between the self-image and the role expectations of society, the *search for identity*.

The concept of *identity* (sometimes also called ‘ego identity’) is one of Erikson’s most important contributions to psychology.

Definition

Identity is a complex concept that can be defined as people’s images of themselves, including the feeling that a thread of continuity runs through their lives, and that their self-images and the views others have of them are essentially in agreement (Erikson, 1963:261; Roazen, 1976:25).

People have a sense of identity when they manage to integrate all their identifications, drives, wishes and expectations, abilities and skills with the opportunities society offers them (Erikson, 1963:261). The quest for identity often causes adolescents to clash with the rules of society and with persons who are close to them. The danger of this stage is that they may become confused in their search for identity and a suitable social role. Erikson explains typical adolescent behaviour patterns, such as participation in group activities, falling in love and the predilection for youth movements, as part of the search for identity (Erikson, 1963:262).

Society accommodates the adolescent’s search for identity by providing a psychosocial moratorium (in other words, a period of grace for youths to pursue their quest for identity relatively undisturbed, a period in which they are allowed to experiment with various identities). Society, according to Erikson, is not only exceptionally tolerant of adolescent behaviour, it also provides active support in the form of social institutions such as colleges, universities, tribal schools, military service and extended vocational training.

The ego strength that results from a satisfactory resolution of the identity crisis, Erikson calls *reliability* or *fidelity*. This ego strength is characterised by certainty about one’s own identity, an accepting awareness of other possible identity choices which the individual could have made, and a capacity for loyalty towards one’s social role or roles (Erikson, 1963; Erikson, 1968; Ryckman, 1989).

Early adulthood: Intimacy versus isolation: Love

The achievement of ego identity, which is usually reached in early adulthood, enables individuals to share their identity with another person, that is, to have ongoing relationships and to develop the ethical strength to continue the relationships despite the sacrifices and compromises they might demand (Erikson, 1963:263). The development crisis, based on the choice to be involved in a relationship or not, is characterised by **intimacy versus isolation**.

The most intimate relationship in most cultures is marriage, but there are also other forms of committed relationships between people who love each other. The evasion of such experiences is the result of identity confusion, which flows from failure during the previous stage, and leads to a feeling of isolation and preoccupation with the self. Young adults find themselves in the crisis of having to choose between the two extremes.



The most intimate relationship in most cultures is marriage.

Source: Fotolia: 17404189, Fotolia: 60995353, Pearson asset library: AL1131285, Alamy Stockj Photo: DYK5CG, Alamy Stock Photo: DYJCK1

Resolution of this crisis leads to the ego strength of *love* or *true genitality*, which Erikson defines as follows (1963:266):

In order to be of lasting social significance, the utopia of genitality should include:

- mutuality of orgasm
- with a loved partner
- of the other sex
- with whom one is able and willing to share mutual trust
- and with whom one is able and willing to regulate cycles of work, procreation and recreation
- so as to secure for the offspring, too, all the stages of a satisfactory development.

The synthesis between intimacy and isolation – *the attainment of true love* – leads directly to the next stage.

Adulthood: Generativity versus self-obsession and stagnation: Care

This stage covers the period from approximately 25 to 65 years of age and the development crisis of this stage is characterised by *generativity versus self-obsession and stagnation*. In a certain sense it is the most important developmental stage because it spans generations. While adults are still developing themselves, they are also intensely involved in the development of the next generation.

(Erikson, 1963:266–267; 1964:130), believes that adults need to feel that people need them and that this need finds expression in wanting to care for other people, and in wanting to pass on knowledge and traditions to them. If this need is not met, a feeling of stagnation and an obsession with the self develops: individuals treat themselves as if they were their own only child (Erikson, 1964:130). The inability of adults to develop a sense of generativity is often the result of unresolved crises in early childhood, specifically a lack of trust in society and in the future of humanity (Erikson, 1963:267).

Adults find themselves experiencing the crisis of having the need and ability to participate meaningfully in the development of humanity, and yet at the same time of being threatened by a feeling of meaninglessness and stagnation. The need to participate is realised mainly, but certainly not exclusively, through the rearing of their own children. Erikson specifically points out that the need to care and to provide for the future can also be fulfilled by participating, in both a creative and a conserving way, in cultural processes, for example, through creative work such as art and craftwork, and by transmitting knowledge, skills and values to others, especially young people (Erikson, 1963:267).

Resolution of this crisis leads to the ego strength of *care*, which Erikson (1964:131) defines as ‘... the widening concern for what has been generated by love, necessity, or accident’ and as ‘man’s love for his works and ideas as well as his children’.

Maturity: Ego integrity versus despair: Wisdom

The last developmental stage begins somewhere between 60 and 70 years of age, depending on the person's health and the cultural environment and is characterised by the developmental crisis **ego integrity versus despair**. At this stage people look back on their lives knowing that the end is near. It is precisely this finality that looms that generates the crisis of this stage.

On the positive side, individuals who have successfully resolved the previous crises of their lives are able to accept themselves and others fully (Erikson, 1963:268). Such individuals have ego integrity, that is, the feeling that their lives have been unique, that they can look back on life with satisfaction and that they are ready to die because they can accept its totality. People who have not successfully dealt with previous crises, however, are unable to feel satisfied and feel despair instead, characterised by a fear of death and the desire to live their lives over again.

Erikson calls the ego strength flowing from a successful resolution to the crisis of ageing *wisdom*, which he describes as 'detached concern with life itself, in the face of death itself' (1964:133).

Erikson's wife, Joan Erikson, added a 'ninth stage' in the extended version of his book, *The life cycle completed. Extended version with new chapters on the ninth stage by Joan M. Erikson* (1998), that applies to people who become very old. As the eighties and nineties bring new demands, re-evaluations and new difficulties to cope with, she maintains that the experience of the deterioration of a person's body and mind magnifies the despair of stage eight. The increased loss of physical abilities leads to a loss of self-esteem and trust in themselves and of the environment. According to her, old people confront all previous stages again, but this time all stages converge at the same time, with the negative pole (i.e. *mistrust*, *despair*) taking the dominant role.

The website below provides a link to a video, *On Old Age I: A conversation with Joan Erikson at 90*, uploaded by Davidson Films Inc., in which Joan Erikson talks about rethinking stage eight of the development stages.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00DUXNQLAJQ>

The website below provides a link to a video, *On Old Age II: A conversation with Joan Erikson at 92*, uploaded by Davidson Films Inc., in which Joan Erikson talks about caring for old people and the reason why despair overshadows integrity as an ego strength at this stage.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=158CneVejkk>

Enrichment

Erikson, in his old age, expands his view of life

In an interview with the journalist Daniel Goleman (1988), Erik and Joan Erikson talk about their new vision of the eighth stage of development and the reasons for their new insights. The original chart of the life cycle was developed in 1950, as Joan Erikson explains: 'When we looked at the cycle in our 40s, we looked to old people for wisdom. At 80, though, we look at other 80-year-olds to see who got wise and who not. Lots of people don't get wise, but you don't get wise unless you age.' She explains how old people are confronted with all previous stages and how it can be resolved in a positive or negative way, taking certain restraints into account.

(*The New York Times*, 14 June, 1988)

In their research, Brown and Lowis (2003) found support for a *ninth stage* of psychosocial development applicable to people in their eighties and nineties.

An understanding of this stage will not only help the elderly and caretakers, but could also help to pave the way to get to the stage of *gerotranscendence*, the stage at which people are peacefully ready to move to the next stage of existence, corresponding to certain aspects of Erikson's notion of ego integrity. The term was coined by a Swedish sociologist, Lars Tornstam (2011: 166), implying:

... a shift in meta perspective from a materialistic and rational view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally accompanied by an increase in life satisfaction.

Building on the input of Jung and Erikson, Tornstam's (2011) aim was to present a positive theory of human aging which includes the potential of maturing into a new outlook on and understanding of life. According to him, maturing into gerotranscendence presupposes a new cosmic awareness and understanding of fundamental existential questions. This implies:

- a redefinition of the perception of time and space (i.e. today and yesterday can be present at the same time; or the world can be experienced as big and small at the same time)
- a redefinition of the perception of life and death and the transcendence of the fear of death
- an acceptance of the mystery of life (i.e. not everything can be explained, or have to have a meaning)
- a decreased interest in material things.

It also presupposes a redefinition of the self and social relationships, implying:

- an acceptance of the darker side of the personality, and a decrease in self-centredness, focusing more on others
- a decreased interest in superficial social interaction
- a redefining of old conventions and norms to suit themselves and a transcendence of the right-wrong duality together with an increased tolerance and broadmindedness.

Activity

Using your own life as a case study, try to determine how you handled the developmental crisis at each stage of development and which ego strengths you attained.

Self-evaluation questions

- Provide a summary of the developmental stages distinguished by Erikson using an epigenetic chart. Explain the principle 'epigenetic development' on the basis of any developmental stage.
- Explain Erikson's use of the concept 'mode' and the influence of 'organ modes' on the individual's further development.
- Discuss the added 'ninth stage' to Erikson's stages of development, providing reasons why you think such a stage should or should not be added.
- Which of the developmental stages distinguished in Erikson's theory would you regard as the most important stage? Provide reasons for your answer.

7.7 Optimal development

As he focused so much on development, one would expect Erikson to present a specific view of optimal development, but did he in fact have a unique view?

Erikson's perception of optimal development flows directly from his view of development throughout the lifespan. According to him, an optimally developed person could simply be described as someone who has successfully resolved the developmental crisis of each stage and who therefore possesses all the ego strengths. This view, however, requires some amplification.

In the first place, note should be taken that Erikson describes development as occurring according to the epigenetic principle and in a holistic manner. This means not only that development takes place sequentially, but also that each crisis has to be worked through afresh at each stage. This implies, further, that one can talk of optimal development during each stage.

A young adult develops optimally to the extent that he or she is able to resolve all the developmental crises in a manner appropriate to his or her age. An optimally developed young adult not only satisfactorily resolves the crisis of 'intimacy versus isolation' and acquires the ego strength of 'love', but is also able to experience the positive aspects of each developmental crisis concerning those facets of life in evidence during this developmental stage, namely:

- trust and hope in one's partner and the future of one's family
- the will-power to take autonomous decisions about the family's lifestyle (residence, etcetera)
- goal-directedness to take decisions about the moral education of the children
- competence to work so that the family is properly cared for
- reliability so that one is accepted and appreciated by one's family and so that the family and other people can depend on one
- love and care for one's spouse and family
- wisdom in the sense that one accepts one's life, identity and whatever decisions one has taken thus far.

An optimally developed person of any age could be described in similar terms. Each would show the positive traits of hope, will-power, goal-directedness, competence, reliability, love, care and wisdom, although each would manifest these traits differently depending on age, sex and socio-cultural background.

Even though this description of optimal development might look like an impossible ideal, it should be kept in mind that Erikson has an optimistic view of development and makes provision for spontaneous recovery from developmental mistakes or inadequacies. He believes that it always remains possible for a person who experiences developmental problems in the early stages to develop optimally in later stages.

Finally, optimal development for Erikson implies a kind of fundamental unity between the individual and society. This implication is evident from his description of the positive aspects of the different stages. All the ego strengths and other positive attributes that flow from the various stages include a relationship of one kind or another with specific people or with society as a whole, for example:

- *hope* includes hope and trust in the future of society and even in the whole of humankind
- *competence* includes the ability to do things which can benefit the group and skills which will be used during adulthood to care for the family
- *generativity and care* include the need to care for other people and especially the need to provide for the future of the group and the whole of humankind.

Each positive trait not only has meaning for the individual; it is also there for the good of the entire society.

Self-evaluation question

- How does Erikson's view of optimal functioning differ from that of his mentor, Freud?

7.8 Views on psychopathology

With Erikson's positive view of development in mind, that is, that unsuccessful resolutions of the developmental crisis can be rectified, does he provide any view on pathological behaviour?

In his published writings, Erikson does not formulate comprehensive ideas on the nature and origin of mental disorder. In his discussion of patients, he sometimes uses a Freudian conceptual framework (for example that symptoms are caused by childhood drives and guilt feelings, Erikson, 1963:34), but in his description of the developmental stages another perspective emerges. While the positive poles of the developmental crises and the ego strengths, which result from satisfactory crisis resolutions, define the core characteristics of the optimally developed person, the negative poles form the basis of mental illness. Erikson does not provide much specific information in this regard since his interest focuses on healthy development.

The following are examples of the connections between negative development and mental disorders that Erikson does indicate. He sees schizophrenia in children and schizoid and depressive conditions in adults as being characterised by a lack of basic trust (Erikson, 1963:248). Shame and doubt are linked to compulsive neurosis and paranoia (Erikson, 1963:252), while ineffective resolution of the crisis named *initiative versus guilt* is associated with hysterical neuroses, exhibitionism and psychosomatic illnesses (Erikson, 1963:257). Erikson links role confusion with

various mental problems, such as megalomania, phobias and prejudice (Erikson, 1963, 326–358). Finally, he associates stagnation with hypochondria and what he terms ‘personal impoverishment’ (Erikson, 1963:267). While he does not explain what he means by personal impoverishment, it appears from the context that it refers to something similar to Viktor Frankl’s ‘existential neurosis’.

7.9 Implications and applications

7.9.1 Psychotherapy

As a trained psychoanalyst, did Erikson make a unique contribution to psychotherapy?

According to Erikson’s theory, psychological problems are the outcome of circumstances that prevent the individual from finding satisfactory solutions to developmental crises. In his view, then, psychotherapy has the function of helping an individual to find better solutions to these crises.

The basic principles of Erikson’s therapy are, in many respects, the same as those of Freud, but there are several differences in emphasis and specific techniques. Erikson and Freud both use interpretation of behaviour to try and uncover clients’ underlying problems and to try to help clients work through their problems, thereby processing problematical drive energy and strengthening their egos. However, Freud preferred to use dream interpretation (which he regarded as ‘the royal road to the unconscious’), while Erikson worked mainly with the interpretation of play – particularly in the context of play therapy – and other ritualisations. He therefore placed far greater reliance on the client’s own ego and ability to resolve crises spontaneously. All in all, Erikson’s theory implies a more optimistic view of psychotherapy than does Freud’s classical psychoanalysis.

7.9.2 Measurement and research

Did Erikson’s theory stimulate any research or the development of psychological measuring techniques?

Within the framework of modern psychoanalytical approaches, Erikson’s theory is often regarded as the one that has stimulated most research (Hall *et al.*, 1985:99). The concept that has stimulated the most attention is that of identity. Research studies of this topic have, by and large, produced results that support Erikson’s theory of identity formation (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981; Maddi, 1989; Thom, 1990; Cloninger, 1996; Schultz & Schultz, 2005).

Schwartz (2001; 2005) made a comprehensive survey of identity research rooted in Eriksonian and neo-Eriksonian theory, in which he pays attention to methodological short-sightedness, a narrow and limited theoretical approach and neglect of important applied and social issues related to identity formation.

Methodologically he identified two shortcomings:

- The predominant reliance on university student samples which creates problems with generalisation, resulting in important areas not being addressed (such as studies on younger adolescents; studies on non-university emerging adults; studies that include greater numbers of poor and less educated individuals; and a need to include more non-Whites in identity research). Schwartz's (2005:297) main concern about the need for more research on ethnic identity is caused by the rapidly growing non-White populations in the United States and European countries, and the lack of an integrated theory that might be applicable to both Whites and non-Whites.
- The need for longitudinal research. The large majority of identity research has been cross-sectional and is limited to data collection at only one point in time, thereby leaving the developmental functions of identity unaddressed. Schwartz (2005:299) acknowledges Marcia's (1966; 1993) contribution towards broadening the concept of ego-identity and documenting the stance of cross-sectional research, but he proposes that it is time to 'progress to longitudinal studies'.

Schwartz (2005) notes that most of the identity research focused on the identity process and how it relates to personality characteristics, decision making and intrapsychic qualities, without paying attention to identity development in relation to certain important applied issues, such as health risk behaviour (i.e. substance abuse and unsafe sex); psychological problems (i.e. anxiety and depression); immigration, acculturation, adoption and terrorism. He concludes that such an expansion in the focus of identity research 'may permit identity to make a maximal contribution to promoting good health and improving people's quality of life'.

Although Erikson's theory has not led to much innovation in the field of psychological measurement, Erikson himself did develop a kind of projective method, which he called *play construction*, for assessing children, whereby they are asked to think up a story and to represent scenes from this, using figurines and wooden blocks (Erikson, 1963; Schultz & Schultz, 2005). A number of instruments for measuring Eriksonian concepts have also been developed, such as the *Ego-Identity Scale* (Dignan, 1965), the *Inventory of Psychosocial Development* (Constantinople, 1969), *A short measure of Eriksonian Ego Identity* (Tan, Kendis, Fine & Porac, 1977) and the *Eriksonian Psychosocial Stage Inventory: EPSI* (Rosenthal, Gurney & Moore, 1981). A modified version of the EPSI was developed by Darling-Fischer and Leidy (1988) to include all eight stages of development, because the original inventory assessed only the first six stages of the life cycle development. Domino and Affonso's (1990), *Inventory of Psychosocial Balance*, was also designed to measure all eight Eriksonian psychosocial stages. In South Africa, Ochse and Plug (1986) developed a questionnaire for the evaluation of development during the first seven stages. This cross-cultural research on the validity of Erikson's theory of personality development in the multi-cultural South African context revealed, among other things, that there are major differences between socio-cultural groups with regard to identity formation.

7.9.3 Implications for society in general

What are the implications for the individual and society in general of Erikson's premise that the individual and society are interrelated and connected?

Erikson's theory has many implications for society as a whole. The fact that he sees such a close tie between the epigenetic development of the individual and society (1963:73) means that the group can gain many benefits from the healthy development of its members, and that individual psychological development is affected by the society and culture (Roazen, 1976:22).

In the South African context, Erikson's analysis of the problems around the development of identity can contribute a good deal towards a better understanding of the prevailing situation in this country. The individual's search for identity in a society with a complex socio-cultural structure can be extremely difficult. Schwartz (2005:297) calls attention to the possibility that identity formation can differ between cultural notions of individualism (i.e. prioritising the individual over the group) and collectivism (i.e. prioritising the group over the individual). There is evidence, according to him, that individuals from collectivist cultures will more likely defend their group against negative feedback, regardless of the feedback that they receive individually.

Questions that individuals are faced with in the multi-cultural South African society include:

- With which group(s) do I identify?
- Who is included in the groups with which I identify: Everyone who lives in South Africa, or only members of certain language or ethnic groups, or only people who share my political or religious views?
- Which name(s) is/are acceptable to me: South African, Black, Coloured, Afrikaner, English, Sotho, Zulu, Tswana, Xhosa, Zulu or Venda?
- What do I do when a group with which I identify does not want to accept me as a member?
- What do I do when some members of the group with which I identify refuse to accept people whom I regard as members of the group?
- What do I do when the divisions separating groups changed to such an extent that my earlier identifications are no longer appropriate?

Erikson would probably have had one simple answer to all these questions, namely that the identity of an optimally developed person includes not only all his own compatriots and group, but all humanity without prejudice towards other individuals belonging to other groups (be it tribe, nation, class, religion or ideology). Erikson (1968b; 1985), in fact, regards humankind as a whole and calls the tendency to form sub-groups *pseudo-speciation*. The term implies that groups (especially national and ethnic groups) have an exaggerated sense that they are different from other groups, as though they were a separate species. This can lead to exaggerated 'in'-group loyalties, such as feelings of superiority and clannishness, with the exclusion of the 'out'-group.

In certain severe instances prejudice towards 'out'-groups can be expressed in feelings of hatred and phobic avoidance. Erikson warns that such prejudice can produce people more beastly than any beasts, eventually leading to war.

Activity

Take yourself and a small 'in'-group of friends as a sample. Answer the above questions about group identity and affiliation that you and your 'in'-group are confronted with in the multi-cultural South African society. Determine how strong or weak the tendency of pseudo-speciation is in your group.

7.9.4 The interpretation and handling of aggression

Erikson regarded himself as a Freudian, but did he share Freud's views on the subject of aggression?

Erikson's name is rarely mentioned in literature on the subject of aggression and violence, while Freud is usually exhaustively discussed (Berkowitz, 1993; Campbell & Gibbs, 1986; Meyer, 1982; Rattner, 1970; Siann, 1985; Werbik, 1974; Zillman, 1978). Nevertheless, Erikson did have a number of interesting ideas on this subject, and his theory seems to offer more promising suggestions for dealing with violence than that of his mentor, particularly in the context of social violence. Indeed, Erikson's view of aggression is particularly relevant for the modern world, and specifically for countries, such as South Africa, in which violence is associated with tension between a variety of cultures and peoples.

As with a number of Freud's ideas, Erikson accepts his mentor's thinking on human aggression up to a point, but he first expands it and then produces an entirely new, 'Eriksonian' explanation.

As a follower of Freud, Erikson accepts Freud's conception of a death wish as the cause of all aggressive behaviour, but he extends it by pointing out that all the psychosocial modalities of the pre-genital stage (incorporation, retention, elimination and intrusion) may be used in an aggressive way (Erikson, 1963). His own 'Eriksonian' contribution to explaining violence and aggression is linked to his concepts of ritualisation, identity, negative identity and pseudo-speciation (most of which have been discussed earlier in this chapter), and focuses particularly on social violence.

Erikson (1966a) maintains that Freud's assertion that people resolve their social conflicts in the same way as animals, through violence, contains two flaws. The first is that human behaviour is determined by instinctive drives only to a limited extent, while the second is that Freud's contention is based on an incorrect interpretation of animal behaviour. Erikson invokes the research of ecologists such as Lorenz (1964; 1968) who show that disputes between members of the same animal species are settled by means of ritualised threats, and that serious injuries are relatively infrequent. He points out that humans have also developed ritualised methods of settling disputes, such as peace negotiations and peace treaties, and Gandhi's method of passive resistance.

Example

Erikson on Gandhi's passive resistance

Mahatma Gandhi developed his method of passive resistance, which he himself called 'Satyagraha' ('truth force'), in attempting to help the oppressed Indians of South Africa and colonial India in their struggle against the governments of the day. The method consists, in essence, of a non-violent refusal on the part of the repressed workers to work, thereby posing resistance to authority without actively threatening anyone.

Erikson points out that this method is strongly reminiscent of a dog's display of submission when it acknowledges the superior power of an opponent by rolling over onto its back and exposing the most vulnerable part of its body, but adds that the method is also different in certain ways. Passive resistance is not behaviour that is regulated by instinct, but action that is minutely and consciously planned. In addition, it does not lead to the automatic, reflexive cessation of an opponent's aggression as is the case with the display of submission among animals. Accordingly, each instance of passive resistance has to be thoroughly planned for each specific situation. In Erikson's own words (Erikson, 1966a:493):

... it seems that in his immense intuition in regard to historical actuality ... Gandhi was able to recognize some of those motivations in man which, in their instinctual and technical excess, have come between him and his pacific propensities; and that Gandhi created a social invention (Satyagraha) which transcends those motivations under certain conditions.

The basic power of 'passive resistance', according to Erikson, lies in the fact that it occurs without any threat to the opponents, that they do not need to find reasons for excusing their own aggressive behaviour, and that the opponents ultimately feel ashamed of their aggression. Erikson (1966a:494) describes it as follows:

The acceptance of suffering and, in fact, of death, which is so basic to his 'truth force', constitutes an active choice without submission to anyone ... It is at once a declaration of non-intent to harm others, and [here the parallel to peace rituals in animals is most striking] an expression of faith in the opponent's inability to persist in harming others beyond a certain point, provided, of course, that he is convinced that neither his identity nor his rightful power is in real danger.

The fact that, among humans, peace rituals do not always succeed in eliminating aggression is attributed by Erikson to the limited extent to which human behaviour is regulated by instinct. He points out, in addition, that human beings are divided into pseudo-species, in other words, groups such as tribes, nationalities, religions and classes who treat one another as if they belonged to different species. As a matter of fact, many of the names groups use to describe themselves actually mean 'humans', while they use different names for other groups, clearly implying that 'the others' are not people (Erikson, 1966a:489).

Hostility between these groups is reinforced by the phenomenon of negative identity formation, which corresponds, to some extent, with Freud's notion of projection. According to Erikson (1959; 1966a), characteristics people suppress or are afraid of having, or those that are attributed to them by other people, which they do not want to have or try to deny, are projected on to other people, particularly members of other groups, in an exaggerated form. In times of tension and conflict such negative identity formation can lead to violent opposition to any kind of 'otherness' – in others or in oneself.

This interpretation of tension and violence between groups leads Erikson to suggest that violence can be dealt with through forming a wider identity, which he defines as follows (1966b:502):

A truly wider identity ... includes not only the capacity for empathic identification with other people – and especially with people at first perceived as incomprehensibly ‘other’ – but also the willingness to understand the otherness as well as the all-too-familiar in ourselves.

For Erikson (1966b; 1972), the ideal is to be found in extending one’s own identity so that, ultimately, it includes the whole of humanity, even groups or pseudo-species one formerly despised, and in the ability and courage not simply to accept cultural heterogeneity, but also to enjoy it.

Self-evaluation question

- What are the implications of Erikson’s theory, with reference to his premise of the connectedness between the individual and society, his identity concept and view of violence and aggression, for a multicultural society such as South Africa?

7.10 Evaluation of the theory

What influence has Erikson’s work had on psychology?

Erikson’s work has had a broad influence on psychology, particularly developmental psychology. In fact, he can probably safely be regarded as the best known and most influential of all modern psychoanalysts. According to Schultz and Schultz (2005), the recent increase in research and theory in the field of lifespan development is mainly due to Erikson’s work in this field. It is primarily as a result of his influence that psychologists started to study the later stages of development, middle and old age, more intensively (DiCaprio, 1974; Schultz & Schultz, 2005).

As a theory based on psychoanalytical principles and methods, Erikson’s theory is subject to the same kind of criticism as Freud’s, particularly so with regard to his view of the first stages of development, which is closely aligned with Freud’s thinking. Although Erikson’s theory is often criticised as flowing chiefly from unverified speculation, it must be pointed out that there is a fair body of research in support of his ideas, particularly the studies on identity (Marcia, 1993; Schwartz, 2001; 2005).

It should also be remembered, however, that this theory is based on wide experience in psychotherapy, especially with children. What the theory may lack in scientific and experimental discipline is more than compensated for by Erikson’s wisdom and sensitive observation. Although it is predominantly a developmental theory, it makes an important and interesting contribution to our understanding of general human functioning. Hergenhahn (1994) maintains that Erikson’s theory is widely regarded as one of the most useful psychological theories, and points out that several of the concepts formulated by him, such as psychosocial development, ego strength, identity, identity crisis, life history and psychohistory, are part of our everyday vocabulary today.

Enrichment

Erikson Institute

The *Erikson Institute* is a graduate school in child development, located in Chicago and named after Erik Erikson. The institute was founded in 1966, with the mission to provide a comprehensive education in child development and the understanding of family and culture in a child's life. Recently in 2009, a *Center for Children and families* were opened with the aim to offer assessment and treatment services for children from birth to the age of eight. (Website: www.erikson.edu).

Self-evaluation question

- What, in your view, is Erikson's major contribution to personology?

7.11 Suggested reading

Erikson, EH (1963). *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.

Erikson, EH (1969). *Gandhi's truth*. New York: Norton.

Erikson, EH (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.

Erikson, EH (1980). *Identity and the life cycle*. New York: Norton.

Erikson, EH (1982). *The life cycle completed: A review*. New York: Norton.

Roazen, P (1976). *Erik Erikson: The power and limits of a vision*. New York: Free Press.



Chapter 8

The language-oriented theory of Jacques Lacan (1901–1981)

Andrea Hurst

The chapter at a glance

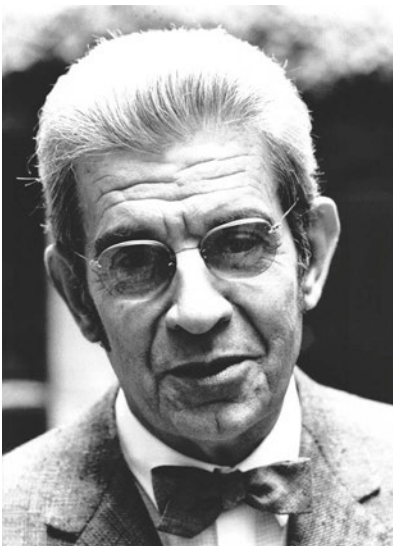
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8.1 Outcomes

- Explain why a Lacanian approach to psychoanalysis challenges analysts to pay extremely careful attention to language acquisition and use.
- Describe the differences between a Cartesian (essentialist) and a Lacanian (relational) view of the person.
- Describe and explain the three parts of the split-subject.
- Describe and explain ‘the unconscious’ as structured by the orders of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic.
- Describe in detail the main stages in a Lacanian theory of personal development and explain why it is important to study these stages.
- Explain the differences between neurosis and psychosis in Lacanian theory.
- Describe and explain the ‘linguistic tools’ available for the psychoanalytic treatment of neurosis.
- Explain why the ‘linguistic tools’ available for the treatment of neurosis do not work for the treatment of psychosis.
- Critically discuss the argument that a non-patriarchal and/or local language should be developed for contemporary psychoanalytic theory.

8.2 Background

Why is language so central in Lacanian theory and what are the implications of this focus on language?



Jacques Marie Lacan
Source: Getty Images. Gallo Images

Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) was initially trained as a psychiatrist in Paris. However, even the title of his 1932 doctoral thesis, translated as *On paranoid psychosis in its relations to the personality*, indicates his dissatisfaction with the medicalised discourse of traditional psychiatry and his later interest in Freud. Lacan’s engagement with psychoanalysis lasted for half a century. Beginning as an analysand (with Rudolph Löwenstein), Lacan also became a major theoretician, practitioner and teacher (Evans, 1996:134; 153).

Lacan was an autodidact – that is, a person who taught himself – and never stopped learning. He kept his thinking open to influences across diverse fields, including philosophy, mathematics, surrealism, linguistics and structural anthropology. His aim was to create a psychoanalytic theory for his times. Psychoanalytic theories are ‘languages’ that make it possible to discuss psychoanalytic therapy (Evans, 1996). These languages articulate, modify and create theoretical concepts and terms in critical dialogue. All also strive to develop appropriate therapeutic practices and training programmes for practitioners.

Lacan held a weekly seminar in Paris for 27 years. Here he articulated his diverse and controversial psychoanalytic language. He elaborated on the fundamental role that language plays in all aspects of a person’s existence, taking this to be Freud’s most important insight. Lacan describes our development as persons in terms of language acquisition and our increasing ability to use extremely complex sign-systems, from body language, through iconic and spoken languages, to highly abstract symbolic systems.

Enrichment

In Lacanian theory, somebody who has not acquired language at all might be human, but cannot be a person. Compare this claim with the idea of 'personhood' underlying the African conception of *ubuntu*. In what ways is it similar or different?

A Lacanian approach to psychoanalysis challenges analysts to pay careful attention to the complex domain of language acquisition and use in both theory building and therapeutic practice.

Freud offers a basic theoretical orientation that Lacan respects and upholds. But Freud's concepts offered him points of entry for piecing together a psychoanalytic language of his own. This language is often difficult and sometimes obscure. Like Freud, Lacan did not write up a finished system of ideas, but instead made his 'work in progress' public through discussions, writings and seminars. He allowed his concepts to undergo various changes over the years: hesitant and gradual modifications of his ideas; additions to existing concepts that made them more complex; as well as shifts and reversals in the meanings of terms (Evans, 1996).

Lacan intentionally resisted offering a final 'language', or, that is, a closed system of related concepts for students merely to grasp and apply. Rather, his texts invite students to grapple actively and critically with networks of concepts that do not have absolute and fixed meanings, but take on different connotations in different contexts (Evans, 1996; Fink, 2007). By implication, today's analysts cannot simply use Freud's or Lacan's theoretical language as it stands, but need to bring psychoanalytic concepts up to date. The Lacanian concepts outlined below should serve as points of entry for 'piecing together' a contemporary psychoanalytic language.

In Lacanian terms, different psychopathologies develop due to different kinds of disturbances at different stages of language acquisition. Following Freud, Lacan describes these in terms of three main psychological mechanisms – *foreclosure*, *repression* and *disavowal* – which are tied respectively to psychosis, neurosis and perversion. These are explained in more detail below. Further, interpersonal communication occurs through language. It is the very medium of psychoanalytic therapy and thus, language provides all of the 'tools of the trade'.

KEY TERM

talking cure: a catchy metaphor offered by Bertha Pappenheim that indicates that language is the very medium of psychoanalytic therapy and provides all of the 'tools of the trade'

Freud recognised that Bertha Pappenheim's catchy metaphor, the **talking cure**, captured in a nutshell what psychoanalysis was all about (Freud & Breuer, 2004:28). A Lacanian approach to therapy demands that potential analysts develop excellent language skills. At a theoretical level, those who expect accessible texts about ideas that are simple to understand and apply do not grasp how language works. This expectation often results in the simplistic popularisation of theoretical ideas, which leads to misconceptions. A simplistic understanding of how language works is also dangerous in therapeutic practice, since it implies a fundamental misunderstanding of the person (as a thoroughly linguistic being) and as a result, ineffective application of the linguistic tools of the trade.

The following website provides further information about Lacan and explores the many diverse aspects of Lacanian theory; *LacanOnline.com: Exploring psychoanalysis through the work of Jacques Lacan*. The website can be accessed through: <http://www.lacanonline.com/index/>

Enrichment

Consider the responsibility Lacan places on you to develop theory yourself, for a contemporary context.

1. Do research to find out what major innovations have occurred since Lacan's death in 1981. Possible answers could be: the Internet; social media; sophisticated robotics; the Higgs-boson; awareness of the environmental crisis; transhuman enhancement; feminism and gender studies. Try to list as many as possible.
2. Debate with a colleague or fellow student whether any of these innovations, or others you can list, require us to re-think aspects of what it means to be a person.

Self-evaluation questions

- What are Lacan's reasons for his refusal to write in an accessible way?
- List additional reasons to support his resistance.
- Find counter-arguments, that is, reasons to support the opposite claim that theoreticians *should* write in an accessible language.

Activity

Debate with a colleague or fellow student to establish which set of reasons is more convincing – those for writing in an accessible language, or Lacan's reasons for not writing in an accessible language.

8.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

What are the differences between a Cartesian (essentialist) and a Lacanian (relational) view of the person?

It seems easy to assume that after a person is born, he or she gradually begins to grow and expand by learning new things, for example, how to identify and manipulate objects, treat other people, and communicate through language. But this assumption implies that there is a core substance, the 'essential me', that exists before anything is added through learning. In his famous *Meditations on First Philosophy* (2013), René Descartes describes his 'thought-experiment' in which he tried to subtract everything he acquired through learning.

Self-evaluation question

- Try Descartes' thought experiment for yourself. If you subtract everything acquired through learning, what are you left with?

Descartes (2008) believes he was left with himself as a purely ‘thinking thing’. This is captured in his aphorism, *cogito ergo sum* (‘I think, therefore I am’). Within the Cartesian tradition begun by Descartes, my basic ability to think (rather than my thought-content) is called I or ego. The ego is seen as the active, thinking agent at the ‘control centre’ of a person’s being. I, as the ego, can stand back and observe what is going on in my own mind, and my mind is also transparent to me in proper self-awareness. Proper self-awareness occurs when I can look at myself in the cold light of reason and free myself from irrational ideas and self-delusions. The ego is said to be essentially (by nature) completely free to choose what and how to think and how to behave. The ego can never escape its own freedom by giving up its power to choose, since this is still a freely-made choice. This view of the person leaves us with many problems to solve concerning freedom and responsibility, mainly because it leaves no room for a conception of the unconscious.

Lacan believed that even Freud had overestimated the powers and responsibilities of the ego. This is reflected in Freud’s hope that psychoanalysis could help strengthen the ego’s defences so it could achieve mastery over the forces that threatened it. For Freud, the ego, as the *rational realist* in a person, faces threats both internally from the irrational, pleasure-seeking id impulses, and externally from the social context in the form of an excessively authoritarian (equally irrational) superego. Lacan expresses misgivings about an *ego-psychology* that strives to help the rational realist in a person master internal impulses and rise above irrationalities in the social context. His basic position is that nobody can free themselves from irrational ideas and self-delusions because these are fundamental to what it means to be a person. Further, no social context is ever rationally structured. For Lacan, the aim of strengthening a rational ego devolves into the aim of helping a person adapt to some irrational and fantastical cultural construction of the good citizen (for example, the good worker of consumer capitalism). In his view, it is more honest to work within the necessity of irrationality than view it as a threat to be mastered by a rational ego.

Enrichment

Marcus Pound offers an accessible account of Lacan’s challenge to ego psychology and promotion of language-oriented psychoanalysis in his video, *Lacan by Marcus Pound*. The website can be accessed from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lxKzk8JHO0>

Working within the structuralist and post-structuralist traditions, thinkers like Lacan challenge the Cartesian starting point for thinking about the nature of things, including persons. Instead of thinking in essentialist terms, they argue, we get a better understanding of things, including persons, if we make a fundamental switch in thinking habits and begin to think in terms of complex structures. For Lacan, there is no essential core of a person, defined as the ability to think rationally and freely, that we call the ego. Instead, an adult person is a structure of self-other relations.

Enrichment

A relational, contextual and flexible way of defining things probably feels like common sense today. Lacan was one of the thinkers who propagated this way of thinking. Try, for example, to establish the essential core of a concept such as ‘woman’. Try to list the essential qualities that you must have if you are genuinely a woman. Try to think of these in the form: ‘You cannot be a woman, unless you ...’. You can do the same for concepts, such as being a South African; being mentally ill; being in love; forming a community; practising forgiveness; being a family; creating a home; and so on.

The link below provides access to a short video: *People explain: What is a woman?*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58ysCOIXRM>

List all of the possible definitions of woman offered in the video. Do you agree with any of them? What are the conclusions made by the interviewer? What did she learn?

As will be explained in section 8.4, Lacan follows Freud in showing how the person develops in relation to the other, first in the form of material objects, then as the significant other, and finally as the broader social community. If I subtract any of these self-other relations, I am not left with ‘the essential me’. Instead, the self would disintegrate. Also, this kind of relational definition can include opposite qualities. Lacan views the person as a complex structure that combines multiple, opposing components. This complexity allows him to accommodate the senses in which a person is both autonomous (self-governing) and heteronomous (determined by the Other).

Self-evaluation questions

- When you say to people ‘just be yourself’, what exactly are you telling them to do?
- Describe what being yourself means if you are working with an essentialist, Cartesian definition of the person.
- Describe what being yourself means if you are working with a relational, Lacanian definition of the person.

8.4 The structure of the personality

What does Lacan mean by the term ‘subject’ and how is the subject split up into parts?

Lacan favours the term ‘subject’, as opposed to ‘person’ or ‘self’, because it has a double meaning that brings together opposite aspects of a person (Evans, 1996:195; Fink 1995; 44–45). First, referring to the grammatical subject of a sentence (the thing that acts), it indicates that a person is a free, active agent. In a basic construction such as ‘I love to eat chocolate’, the subject is the first term and the object the thing that gets acted on. Secondly, the word ‘subject’ includes the sense in which a person is not free, but *subject to* the force of something external. This can be the will of another person or a system of rules.

KEY TERM

split-subject: the phrase Lacan uses to describe the person as both free and controlled by external forces, and as split into parts designated in speech by 'I', 'me', and 'it'

KEY TERM

unconscious: the unconscious part of the subject, which is not repressed impulses hidden in the depths, but consists of the underlying symbolic structures (individual and social) that work unnoticed, like grammar, to produce/limit the fundamental desires that in turn shape the ego

8.4.1 The split-subject

Lacan argues that the subject is split into three very different parts. These are clearly represented in the way we ordinarily speak. Think of the following sentence, 'I know that it is widely believed that I am an alien'. In this kind of sentence, we represent a person in three different ways (Evans, 1996:195–196).

The first way is associated with the words 'I know'. Lacan names this form of the subject 'Je' ('I') and describes it as the agent part of the self. It is the one who speaks, and as the seat of action, including self-observation, has the freedom to choose how to act. Unlike Descartes' ego, it is not described as the rational part of the person. For Lacan, most thinking and acting are not rational at all, but motivated by desire.

The second way of thinking of a person is represented by the phrase 'I am an alien'. Lacan names this form of the subject 'moi' ('me'), and later 'ego'. In any form of the sentence 'I am a ...', I speak of 'my ego' as an object of my own reflection (thinking or imagination). My ego is characterised by individualising content, which can change over time, and can be reflected on and reflected back to me by others. For Lacan, this part of myself, my self-image, is a complex social construct.

'I' and 'me' are the two obvious dimensions of a person in the above sentence. What is the third dimension of a person? A clue to this may be found in the phrase 'it is widely believed' and in the related question, 'who is it that does the believing?' The answer is a vague, generalised 'we all', whose belief structures and rules for thought and action work through me, but over which I initially have almost no control. Ironically, I wasn't even there when this external part of me came into being, and yet I will not be a fully human person until it is internalised. Lacan calls this external (to be internalised) dimension of the subject the 'symbolic' dimension. He describes the 'symbolic' dimension in general as the realm of self-other structures that make up the **unconscious** part of the subject (Evans, 1996: 193). The word 'it' in the question 'who is it?' is an extremely precise designation for this part of the subject because these impersonal structures work to shape my desire (and therefore my whole being) without my necessarily being conscious of it.



The split-subject. 'I' am the one who looks. My 'ego' is the one I see. 'It' is the rule of 'dental hygiene' imposed through the one who appraises me by taking the photograph.
Source: Creative Commons
Attribution 2.0 Generic

Unlike Freud's 'Id', the unconscious part of the subject, for Lacan, is not hidden in the depths and it does not represent repressed impulses. Rather, it consists of the underlying symbolic structures (individual and social) that work unnoticed to produce/limit the fundamental desires that in turn shape the ego. This is why Lacan (1993:61;165) famously argues that 'the unconscious is structured like a language'. The underlying symbolic structures work just like the rules of grammar that direct the way we produce coherent enough sentences. Nobody consciously thinks of them while in the flow of ordinary conversations. The only time you become conscious of grammatical rules is when you are trying to learn a language, or when something breaks down, for example, when a sentence makes no sense. Similarly, the fixed subjective structures are only brought to mind when a person experiences disconcerting symptoms of trauma.

KEY TERMS

Imaginary order: a general term for a person's competitive relations with other egos (including the self-image), which take the form of narcissistic, loving identification and aggressive, destructive jealousy

Symbolic Order (big Other): a general term for the structures and principles that co-ordinate group relations between people, including the fundamental ideas and power relations that organise whole communities

Real: a complex concept with different senses (for example, as *jouissance* and as ontological), all of which refer to dimensions that exist beyond a person's perceived reality. These dimensions are not present enough in a person's reality to be recognised directly, but they 'ek-sist' in that reality as the threat of trauma, or as something obscure that 'has happened' but cannot be spoken of. The Real can have effects in the form of symptoms

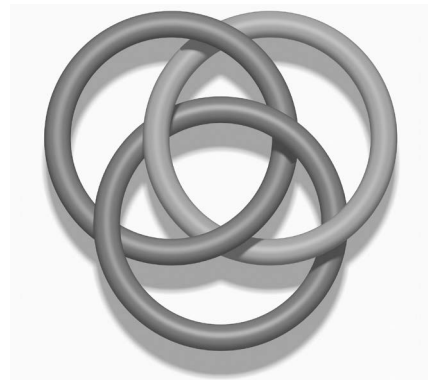
Self-evaluation question

- Describe what Lacan means by the split-subject in terms of the personal pronouns 'I', 'me' and 'it'.

8.4.2 The orders of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic

Lacan describes the underlying *symbolic* dimension that often operates unconsciously in a person in great detail. For him it consists of the structures that belong to interconnected orders: the **Imaginary Order** (Evans, 1996:80–84) and the **Symbolic Order** (Evans, 1996:201–203). Later on the general symbolic dimension (Imaginary and Symbolic) is set off against an incalculable dimension (which is also an aspect of the person) that he calls the **Real** (Evans, 1996:159–161). For Lacan, it is extremely important to develop a deep understanding of these interconnected orders that make up the unconscious part of the personality. This is because the main aim of psychoanalytic treatment is to help individuals uncover these structures and then to work within the parameters they set to help bring about significant change.

These structures and the associated concepts will be discussed as part of the developmental account in the next section. However, it is useful to see how they fit together. One of the best figures that Lacan uses to represent this articulation of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic is the *borromean rings* (Evans, 1996:18–20). The rings are linked in such a way that if one breaks, the other two fall apart as well. The idea is that these orders actually work against each other in a person, but exactly because of this, they hold one another in check. If any one of them is missing, the person disintegrates (Žižek, 2006:8–9).



Borromean rings, representing interlinked orders of Real, Imaginary and Symbolic
Source: Jim Belk. Public domain

Video – Real, Symbolic, Imaginary

The link below provides access to a video, *Real, Symbolic, Imaginary*, in which Corey Anton offers an explanation of each of these orders. (Can be retrieved from: Lacan & Communication Theory)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9taihEzQBRA>

Lacan introduced the concept of the 'Real' quite late in his thinking, and he uses the word 'real' in different and contradictory ways. For introductory purposes, Lacan's distinction between the Real and human reality is most important. He uses the concept *the Real* to account for the fact that in order to cope, all people screen out much of the sensory input. This means that any person's 'reality' is a reduced, selective and limited perspective on all that could be 'out there'.

- Think of the body:** From points of intimate contact (for example, the air we breathe and the things we touch), the Real world extends outward to a point that overwhelms perception. No person can take it all in and we do not know if it ends.
- Think of the ego:** There is always more to any person than the constructed representation called the ego. We are in some senses strangers to ourselves and one another, since every person is characterised by a Real dimension whose mystery nobody has access to.

In the video, *The Borromean Knot of Jacques Lacan; Or, How to Beat Your Death Drive*, Aron Dunlap offers an explanation of the orders of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic, using examples from his own experience. Can be retrieved from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dSVnP8dUm4>

- **Think of the social world:** All people must negotiate their positions within the complex, competing networks of pre-existing social discourses, all of which evolve with the times and retain traces of archaic ideas that support systems and beliefs whose sense is obscure to contemporary subjects. We make our way in a Real social labyrinth that has no natural borders and no exit points.

The Real, for Lacan, acts as a label to indicate the awareness that there is always more to things (world, self, society) than anyone can grasp perceptually and intellectually. Nobody can give the Real content, and people only know of its force when their ‘reality’ is traumatised by something previously not included in its parameters. For example, perhaps due to the family context in which I was raised, my reality might simply exclude the possibility of homosexuality. In this case, a homosexual encounter or experiencing homosexual desire would function as a traumatic event. This is why Lacan describes the Real only as ‘the excess’, ‘the outside’, ‘the impossible’ and ‘the traumatic’.

The symbolic structures of the Imaginary and Symbolic orders work, often unconsciously, to shape a person’s limited ‘reality’ as a defence against various dimensions of the Real. The following paragraphs provide an overview of how the main Lacanian concepts fit together. They will be explained in section 8.5 in terms of the development of the personality.

Self-evaluation questions

- What does it mean to say that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’?
- Describe in detail the structures that make up the unconscious part of the subject.

Activity

The brief overview offered in this chapter shows that the structure of Lacan’s split-subject does not map neatly onto Freud’s notions of Id, Ego and Superego. Draw up a detailed comparison (similarities and differences) between the Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of the split-subject.

8.5 Dynamics and development of the personality

What are the main stages in Lacan’s account of the development of the personality from ‘oceanic’ infancy to the adult split-subject?

Nobody is born a fully split-subject, that is, a fully human person. Instead, Lacan agrees with Freud that a newborn infant’s ‘world’ is an open, ‘oceanic’ unity of all with all, consisting of ‘polymorphously perverse’ pleasures. In this state, there would be no self, no otherness, and the infant would experience complete satiety. Complete satiety, for example, would occur if the infant is fed before feeling hungry and no need arises. If you compare this state with the adult ‘split-subject’ holding the child, clearly a dramatic shift has occurred from infancy to adulthood.

To become a set of self-other relations, situated in an open-ended Real, a person undergoes a long developmental adventure.

Why is it important to study these stages of development? In Lacanian theory, each developmental shift represents a crisis point where things must change decisively; that is, without the possibility of going back. Change means growth; but things can also go wrong at these vulnerable moments of transition. A good understanding of how the process of development works enables an aspiring analyst to more easily pinpoint what subjective structures a person has adopted, and how these might have become pathological. This theoretical understanding, in turn, helps an analyst to make decisions concerning the psychoanalytic approach and techniques to adopt in helping a person work through the miseries that restrict self-actualisation. Understanding subjective development is equally interesting to Lacanians in support of a *positive psychology* that aims towards self-actualisation in those not suffering from debilitating symptoms.

8.5.1 Comparison with Freud's Oedipus complex

For Freud, 'the mother is the first love object of the child' (Evans, 1996:117); it is only the intervention of the father, via the threat of castration, that forces children to give up their desire for the mother and enter into society. Lacan retains this basic developmental framework, and much of his account of an infant's development remains quite close to Freud's account of the Oedipus complex. However, he makes significant adaptations due to his more contemporary language and way of thinking. While Freud argues that subjective agency develops in our efforts to master the drives (first in the form of the id), Lacan re-casts the subject's development in terms of language acquisition. Also, instead of speaking about a literal mother, he speaks about a mothering role, labelled the mOther, which can be filled by any person. The emphasis here is on the notion of 'otherness', rather than gender. This will be the very first, and therefore most significant, other person whom the infant encounters. Lacan generalises the literal father figure to the paternal function, under the label **Nom-du-Père**, and again, any person can perform the paternal function. Finally, he speaks of power in terms of the Phallus, rather than a literal penis that is possessed, envied or threatened with castration (Evans, 1996:140–144). The Phallus stands for the paradoxical kind of power gained from the various positions a subject can adopt in the Symbolic Order; that is, a power that also disempowers because it requires submission to an external structure. In Lacanian language, psychological health is associated with getting over our desire for the Phallus.

KEY TERM

Nom-du-Père: the paternal function which consists of an authoritarian command that breaks the mother-child dyad apart and the fundamental organising principle of a group

Enrichment

One of the major feminist criticisms of psychoanalysis is that Lacan's account of subjective development still uses patriarchal language. Lacan's answer to this charge is that he wants to both retain the descriptive nature of his account (since we are still mostly situated in a patriarchal context) and simultaneously to open it up to the possibility of pertaining to a different kind of society. He therefore generalises the terms of his theoretical language as mentioned above.

(continued)

Descriptively speaking, however, it is usually still the literal mother who plays the role of the mOther in today's world, and the literal father who habitually takes on the paternal function.

Self-evaluation questions

Although men can 'play' mother and women can fulfil the paternal function, many people today still experience role-confusion when this happens, suggesting that Lacan's terms are still descriptive of our reality.

- Can you use language to change this reality?
- Can you formulate other terms, a new language, that can present psychoanalytic insights in a way that is not patriarchal? If so, what terms would you devise to replace terms such as mOther, *Nom-du-Père* and Phallus?

Self-evaluation questions

Urban culture in South Africa is often associated with an absent father.

- Who usually takes on the paternal function in a situation where the father is absent?
- Who takes on the paternal function in your own family?

KEY TERM

jouissance: the impossible ideal of the complete satisfaction of all desire

8.5.2 Alienation from the Real as *jouissance*

Following Freud, Lacan argues that 'alienation from the Real' begins with that first break in an infant's feeling of complete satiety (**jouissance**), which opens up a need that requires satisfaction (Evans, 1996: 91–92). This small breach is essential to kick-start the subject's long developmental adventure. At this point, 'the Real' refers to the infant's feeling of original oceanic unity and appears in Lacan's formulations such as 'there is no absence in the real' and 'the real is without fissure' (Lacan, 1988: 97; 313; Evans, 1996:159).

It is easy (but incorrect) to imagine that the infant must have been in a state of pure being, in paradise, which is lost when the infant first enters the human world of words. We have all heard many versions of the story of the fall from a state of paradise. However, we must not think of the infant's oceanic unity as a state of physical being. To think of it this way is to be tricked by a subjective feeling into creating the so-called 'memory' of a past physical state of full, perfect being that was never present. The Real state that is indeed present in infancy is not a physical state. Instead, it is a subjective feeling that Lacan calls *jouissance*. *Jouissance* means a feeling of complete satiety, where no hungers or needs even arise. Lacan also describes *jouissance* as the 'lack of lack'. To feel *jouissance* is to feel no lacks, losses, gaps or absences. It is *jouissance* that is lost when the first discomforts cause needs that require satisfaction.

Lacan insists that *jouissance* is a subjective feeling rather than a physical state because he wants to make it clear that human physical being-in-the-world was

never, and will never be, characterised by plenitude, fullness or unity. Instead, as mentioned above, it is open-ended, complex and indeterminate. This introduces a second way of thinking about the Real, which emerges at the end of subjective development, which may be called the *ontological Real* to differentiate it from the Real as *jouissance*. This sense of the real will be discussed later in the chapter.

8.5.3 Subjection to the mOther

KEY TERM

mOther: an infant's most significant other, usually the primary caretaker

need, demand and desire: biological needs become alienated as demands (externalised, or socially constructed) when they are articulated in language, and are further alienated when they are repressed as forms of an unconscious desire that is impossible to satisfy

Let us return to the infant, who has just begun the adventure of subjective development with its first cry of need, which marks its alienation from the Real as *jouissance*. The infant has no perception or conception yet of *reality* or of the ontological Real that emerges with it. This gap in satiety that creates need might seem like a small thing, but from the infant's point of view it is a crisis point that is momentous and life threatening. As subjective development progresses, the infant is increasingly alienated from the Real as *jouissance* since more and more of its being is 'overwritten' by signifiers. This subjection to the symbolic begins with the infant's subjection to the **mOther**. Lacan argues that the infant has no real choice but to submit by learning to adapt to 'her' body language, and later 'her' spoken language (Fink, 1995:51). The important moments in this process can be understood in terms of the shifts from **need to demand to desire** (Evans, 1996:34–40).

The social production of needs

At the earliest stage in the process, an infant cries and its primary caretaker/s in the role of mOther set about guessing what it needs. But this is not pure detective work; it is also productive (Fink 1995:6). Infants cry when there is a gap in satiety and some discomfort is experienced. They do not know what the discomfort is, and only gradually form a sense of what they need based on the way the mOther habitually responds. If, for example, the mOther responds with food every time an infant cries in response to some sort of discomfort, the child is likely to associate many sorts of discomfort with hunger. This habituation is retained well into adulthood as comfort eating.

Submission to the mOther continues through a process by which an infant's body comes to be divided up into specific zones of signification (Fink, 1995:11–12). The mOther's body language is expressed, for example, in the way an infant is habitually handled. In learning to adapt to this language, some parts of the infant's body become invested with special significance. Lacan sees this division of the body into erogenous zones as more diverse than Freud's oral, anal and genital zones.

Self-evaluation question

The process of overwriting the body with signification never ends.

- List the ways that we, as adults, submit our bodies to ideals of beauty, perfection, health and morality that obey diverse cultural norms of display and adornment and attitudes towards technological enhancement.

Activity

For Fink (1995:11–12), we can account for the wide variety of psychosomatic symptoms if we accept that our bodies are completely written over by signification.

Do some research to find case studies of psychosomatic illnesses that would support this claim.

From need to demand

Responses from the mOther will not always relieve an infant's discomfort, and resulting anxieties and frustrations motivate a developing infant to bridge the gap between its inarticulate cry, which can only express a discomfort, to the articulation of needs in the form of specific demands.

At this point the infant's symbiotic bond with the mOther is still strong, and it does not perceive any clear distinction between their bodies. However, the weaning process (and its equivalents) represents a crisis point that furthers the child's growing awareness of its separation from the mOther's body. Lacan agrees with Freud that this growing awareness generates extreme anxiety as the infant senses the danger of no longer being sure that its needs will be satisfied. He similarly associates the weaning process with the sense of a profoundly lost object. He agrees with Freud that during the weaning process, suckling becomes increasingly frustrating and anxiety provoking, as incomprehensible absences and prohibitions engender in the infant aggressive hatreds and fears directed toward the withdrawing breast, which now compete with the earlier libidinal loves and pleasures. Eventually, unable to tolerate the extreme tension associated with breastfeeding, the infant represses the breast as a sexual object and shifts its sexual interest to other bodily zones.

The divisions created by dividing the body into zones and losses related to weaning increase the infant's motivation to engage in specific actions (intentional actions of some kind) that direct demands towards the mOther. Lacan articulates Freud's *specific action* in terms of language acquisition. Almost without thinking, parents require, encourage and train infants to 'submit to language' and express their needs through words. For the rest of a person's life the task of representing oneself through language remains a demanding and often frustrating one (Fink, 1995:50). The shift from demand to desire requires the development of a self-other relation.

8.5.4 Construction of the ego in the Imaginary Order

The mirror stage: narcissism and aggression

Up to this point, the child is still a vaguely differentiated bundle of sensations, lacking in sensory-motor coordination and lacking a sense of self. It still takes the mOther's body as an extension of its own being. Lacan's concept of the **mirror stage** represents a major crisis point that changes all of this (Lacan, 2006:75–81; Evans, 1996:114–116; Fink, 1995:55). The mirror stage occurs between the ages of six and eighteen months and is associated with a number of ongoing events.

KEY TERM

mirror stage: the stage in a child's development at which an infant recognises her body as a whole, herself as an ego, and the existence of other persons

- The infant recognises itself as a body-object, a whole thing, rather than a disconnected bundle of sensations.
- Correspondingly, the infant recognises itself as an ego.
- The infant also recognises that there are other persons.

Before the mirror stage, the infant shifts attention between fragmentary forms of the mOther (face, voice, gaze, breast, etc.). Then the infant's gaze becomes captivated by the human form as a whole. Lacan argues that this shift in perception is indicated when children respond to their mirror image with playful excitement. It is remarkable that the infant recognises the mirror image as his or her own. This is an almost uniquely human phenomenon. What makes it so remarkable is that the mirror image reflects the infant's body as a unified whole, but this is not the way the infant experiences his or her body. In other words, human infants are able to take themselves to be something other than their experienced being. This means that recognition of the self in the mirror is always just as much misrecognition (*méconnaissance*).



Lacan's mirror stage, an ambivalent crossroad between narcissism and aggression
Source: Alison Williams. Shutterstock

Lacan argues that this dialectic forms an ambivalent crossroad between **narcissism and aggression** (Lacan, 2006:75–81; 82–101; Evans, 1996:119–120). Lacan defines narcissism as the erotic attraction to the mirror image. He calls the infant's jubilant self-recognition in the mirror image *orthopaedic misrecognition*. Reflecting childhood megalomania, infants mistakenly believe that their bodies, and later their egos, are identical to the reflected perfection. But this joyous self-affirmation is followed by alienating experiences of discord. The infant's lived bodily experience remains fragmentary, in flux, and cannot match the unity promised by the external

mirror image. The Real self does not coincide with the image, leaving the subject with an anxiety-provoking sense of being displaced by the image. Further, the image, as with any promise of an orthopaedic totality, inevitably becomes rigid and alienating. For Lacan, narcissism and aggression go hand in hand. Every narcissistically loved body-image (and later self-image) is always also a misrecognition and is therefore simultaneously an objectifying, alienating armour that elicits aggressive hatred. Intrinsic aggression represents the desire to shatter the alienating, misrecognised identity imposed by the body-image and the alter ego (self-image).

Self-evaluation questions

- Do you think that the narcissism and aggression associated with the mirror image explains all the fantasy images across the board, from children's tales to Hieronymus Bosch? Think of all the head-chopping, belly-ripping, devouring, mutilating, dismembering and other images of fragmented bodies.
- If not, what alternatives can you think of to explain these phenomena that are independent of age, gender or culture?

The developmental struggles regarding 'embodiment' in the mirror stage leave permanent traces in the psyche. While some experience the body as a prosthesis (a support), projecting a robust form that acts in a reliably supportive environment, others inhabit fragile, dissolvable bodies, in an unreliable outside that threatens to negate them. Still others might inhabit the body as an alienating statue, a limiting restriction. However, if infants are not able to develop a basic body language, which physically co-ordinates them with a world of things (for example, due to severe neglect in infancy), they will be unable to take the further developmental steps, which relate them to their own egos, fellow humans, and the discourses that structure communal relations.

The relationship between the body-image and the Real body is the prototype for the formation of the ego, which follows the same dynamic at the crossroads between narcissism and self-destructive aggression. The basic movement is from jubilant identification with the mirror image as the narcissistic *moi*, to the alienation, anxiety and aggression associated with the *moi*'s 'captation' by the mirror image. The word 'captured' brings together the multiple meanings of captivated, captured and castrated (or dominated).

This dynamic is repeated yet again when the infant recognises another person as a whole body rather than perceiving only partial objects. This recognition is still narcissistic. For example, it is not a sign of empathy when a child, seeing a playmate fall, cries. Instead, this indicates that the form of another human is mistaken for a form of the self (a mirror image). This *captation* by the sight of another human follows the pattern of: first, jubilant identification with another person as a counterpart (you are just like me) and enthusiastically adopting the identity offered by significant others; and second, the alienation, anxiety and aggression associated with primordial jealousy.

From demand to desire for the Phallus

Recognition of the mOther as another person carries special significance for the infant, since it involves the recognition of her power to control the infant's lost *jouissance*. Lacan describes this dynamic between child and mOther in terms of the circulation between them of the **Phallus**. The Phallus is best described as shorthand for 'ultimate power to restore *jouissance*'.

KEY TERM

Phallus: the paradoxical kind of power gained from the various positions a subject can adopt in the Symbolic Order; that is, a power that also disempowers because it requires submission to an external structure. In Lacanian language, psychological health is associated with getting over our desire for the Phallus

The child first mistakenly identifies the mOther as the source of the Phallus (Fink, 1995: 53–55; Evans, 1996:34–40). For this reason, every demand directed towards the mOther is not only a verbal articulation of a need, but also an unconditional demand for love (*jouissance*) (Evans, 1996: 122). Gifts from the mOther, for example, often have a symbolic value beyond their use value, since they are seen as expressions of love. But the mOther's uninterrupted presence is the most significant token of her power to be the Phallus, and therefore provide *jouissance*. The fact that a demand for this pure presence can never be satisfied is not something a child immediately recognises (it is something we have to learn). For the child, the mOther needs to be seduced or manipulated into remaining fully present. But child and mother are not evenly matched in this game of seduction (Fink 1995:49). The child is subject to the mOther's desire, helpless in the face of her omnipotence, and has to do all the seductive work.

Therefore, the demand for absolute, unconditional love from the mOther (a return to *jouissance*) turns out to be a desire, rather than a demand. This desire for the mOther goes beyond an incestuous desire for the actual mother. It becomes a striving for what you cannot have because it is an impossible object. The first sense of Lacan's aphorism 'human desire is the desire of the Other' implies *desire for the Other* and points to an insatiable lack. Desire is always desire for something else, and the object of desire is always deferred. The realisation of desire does not fulfil or satisfy desire, but reproduces it. As soon as you get what you want, you realise 'that's not it!' The mOther never provides fully satisfying, unambiguous tokens of her love. She can never satisfy the craving for unconditional love, because she is a split-subject and will never be fully present to the child, even if she tries to be.

At some point a dialectical switch occurs and the child realises that the mOther is not the Phallus (Fink, 1995:53–55). Rather, the mOther lacks the Phallus and she is the one who desires the Phallus. Here, the second sense of Lacan's aphorism 'human desire is the desire of the Other' comes into play. Lacan insists that human desire is not desire for an object, but desire to be the object of the mOther's desire. In general terms, following Hegel, Lacan argues that human desire, or *desire for the Other's desire*, is one human's desire for recognition of his or her value and significance by another human. In other words, the child's attention turns towards becoming the Phallus for the mOther. When the question, *Chevuoi?* (What do you want?), becomes central, it shows that the child now desires rather than demands (Žižek, 2006:42). At this point, children see that they do not yet completely satisfy the mOther's desire – her desire aims at something beyond them.

The fundamental fantasy

No matter how hard a child tries to decipher and satisfy the mOther's desire, it remains unfathomable and enigmatic, since it is part of the Real. For a child, this desire is both mesmerising and thrilling and yet unnerving, overwhelming or even revolting, because it acts as an engulfing force that threatens to swallow the child (Evans, 1996:117; Fink, 1995:95).

This state of uncertainty provokes unbearable anxiety in humans. Even small children are deeply concerned to secure themselves as belonging to a world they understand, even if they construct this understanding in an idiosyncratic way because they don't yet have the conceptual tools to make sense of some things (Fink, 1995:54; Evans, 1996:118; 187). The anxiety subsides when the enigma of the mOther's desire is resolved; that is, once a child decides what the mOther wants, even if it is imagined to be something dreadful (Fink, 1997:61).

KEY TERM

fundamental fantasy:

a general term for the possible stances (psychotic, neurotic or perverse) that a child can take to manage the overwhelming nature of the mOther's desire, which is a dimension of the Real. The stance adopted here indicates the person's unconscious attitude towards the way 'the whole' works, which will, in turn, influence his or her relations to the Other in all of its multiple aspects

Children cope with the trauma of the mOther's desire by configuring a **fundamental fantasy** that places them in relation to the mOther (Fink, 1997:56–57). For example, a child's desire to be the object of the mOther's desire might translate into the fantasy that I am everything to you; it is me who fulfils your every need. I convert whatever I believe you desire from me into my own desire to be just that. Alternatively, desire for the mOther's desire might translate into the fantasy that I am the one you want to admire and serve. You recognise my value and status by giving me everything I desire. I desire the objects you desire, only because you want them and if I possess them it confirms that you recognise my value above yours.

The stance adopted here inaugurates a person's unconscious attitude towards the way 'the whole' works. This fundamental fantasy will function as the cause of a person's own desire for the rest of his or her life, influencing all experiences, including what is feared, enjoyed, fetishised, etc. It will also influence people's relations to the Other in all of its multiple aspects: how their bodies are comported to the material world; how they relate to other people, one on one, in a struggle for recognition from peers; and, finally, how they deal with their entry into the social world.

8.5.5 The order of the Symbolic

Separation from the mOther and subjection to the *Nom-du-Père*

The mOther's desire, Lacan (2007:129) remarks:

... is not something you can bear easily, as if it were a matter of indifference to you. It always leads to problems. The mother is a big crocodile, and you find yourself in her mouth. You never know what may set her off suddenly, making those jaws clamp down. (This translation cited in Fink, 1995:56).

Entry into the Symbolic Order is a major part of subjective development. In this case, the child has to adopt a stance not towards other people one on one, but

towards something more abstract and general, namely, the structures and principles that co-ordinate group relations between people, and organise whole communities. In other words, the child now has to take a stance towards a bigger other, the Symbolic Order. Lacan (1988:236) calls this the *big Other*.

KEY TERM

master signifier: the fundamental principle according to which a specific social system (any group or community) is organised

The agent that helps the child to overcome the primary attachment to the mOther and enter into the Symbolic Order is the person performing the paternal function, the *Nom-du-Père* (the ‘no’ and the ‘name’ of the father). The *Nom-du-Père* has two components. The first is the prohibitive ‘no!’ to the mother-child union. The second is the compensatory offer of a place in the social group. In structure, the place offered in the social group is set up in terms of four discourses: Master, University, Hysteric and Analyst. In content, the *Nom-du-Père* offers the **master signifier**, or fundamental principle, according to which a specific social system (any group or community) is organised.

The prohibitive ‘no!’

The mother-child unity is disrupted for the child when the mOther pays significant attention to a third person, who performs the paternal function (Fink, 1995:56). This person imposes rules of behaviour that bar the child’s easy access to the mOther and requires her to pursue pleasures in more socially acceptable ways. Pathology in a child usually results if the paternal function is ineffective and the mother-child relationship is not disrupted properly. This can occur if the mOther ignores the third person and concentrates only on serving the child’s every desire. It can also occur if there is an ineffective third person, who is indifferent to the paternal function or resists taking on the responsibility.

KEY TERM

psychotic, neurotic and perverse: the main forms of the fundamental fantasy, which are also the only possible fundamental psychopathological structures in Lacanian theory

Structurally, the possible ways in which a child can respond to the paternal function to overcome the attachment to the mOther and enter the Symbolic Order are limited to three basic subject positions: **psychotic, neurotic and perverse** (Evans, 1996:194–195).

However, these include further divisions, which are listed below in the section on psychopathology.

Psychosis, neurosis and perversion

Lacan predominantly defines psychosis in terms of the mechanism of *foreclosure*, that is, the refusal to become a split-subject or submit to the Other as language (Fink, 1995:49–50; Evans, 1996:64; 154–157). This can happen at the level of the encounters with the mOther or as a later refusal to submit to the *Nom-du-Père*.

Psychosis is a response to an ineffective paternal function and the perversion of the caretaker role by cruel or exploitative parent figures. Fink (2007:248) describes this as follows:

The psychotic has generally not been exposed (or only for a very short period of time, or only later in life) to a kind, knowledgeable caretaker who enforces a law in the

household that is not strictly of his or her own making. The ground has been prepared only for an Other who wishes to consume or annihilate the subject's very being, an Other who strives to penetrate and take possession of the subject's very body and soul, an Other who seeks to exploit and/or dispossess the subject of her very mind.

In general, psychosis is understood in terms of the child's refusal or inability to adopt the master signifier, that is, the basic principle of a group's social or cultural order, imposed or given through the paternal function. For Lacan, psychotics do assimilate language and learn to speak, but unlike neurotics, his symbolic universe remains unstructured. The psychotic person remains disoriented, cut adrift from ordinary structures of signification like a small boat without an anchor in a large sea. Psychotics are 'fated' to tie meanings together in their own way (Fink, 1995:55).

The *neurotic structure* for Lacan, as for Freud, describes so-called normal subjectification, where the paternal function has been effectively performed by a parent figure who is predominantly caring and consistently enforces some form of master signifier (moral, political, religious, etc.) (Evans, 1996:78–79; 122–127; Fink, 2007:248).

If the paternal function operates effectively, the prohibitive 'no' works as a protective disruption of the dyadic relation between the mOther and child. It gives the child relief from the excruciating excitements and conflicts associated with the mOther, and breathing space for further development. Ideally, by giving up the mOther as the source of *jouissance* who can fulfil the fundamental fantasy, and submitting willingly to the *Nom-du-Père*, a child reaps its substantial rewards at the price of minor discontent. Becoming a subject in discourse, for example, enables a child, in the end, to claim personal power and freedom as an ethical agent.

Symptomatic neurosis occurs when the child's tie to the mOther, while still recognised as unacceptable, remains impossible to give up. Intense dissonance is created by a necessary but impossible command to conform to a social order that allows no outlet at all for one's deepest desire. This dissonance manifests as neurotic symptoms.

Symptomatic neurosis is defined in terms of the mechanism of *repression*, which creates the unconscious. Here, Lacan's aphorism 'human desire is the desire of the Other' takes on a third important sense: desire belongs to the unconscious. In other words, although the child's style of desire is set via the fundamental fantasy, it is repressed and ends up functioning largely unconsciously. For example, the desire for complete identification with the mOther's desire elicits a repressive overreaction of revulsion, disgust or aversion (Fink, 1995:60). This response (as opposed to neutral indifference) indicates, paradoxically, that the desire is still unconsciously in effect. It could reappear later, for example, in feelings of displeasure or disgust in response to sexually charged encounters. The overwhelming desire for complete admiration from the mOther elicits a repressive overreaction of avoidance.

Again, avoidance indicates that the desire is still unconsciously in effect and it could reappear in a dialect of succumbing to overwhelming pleasure and consequent guilt.

Perversion is the structure given the least attention by Lacanians, possibly because of its close entanglement with Freud's controversial discourse on sexuality, which promotes heterosexual genital intercourse as the norm in relation to which sexual acts are classified as perverse (Evans, 1996:138–140). As a clinical structure, perversion is defined more generally in terms of the mechanism of 'disavowal'. Disavowal has the structure of 'yes, but no'. The subject simultaneously recognises the *Nom-du-Père* and refuses to give up or repress the fundamental fantasy, with its promise of *jouissance*. A perverse subject might agree that incest is immoral, but will argue that the sex games with his sister are not really incestuous because she is more than just a woman. Lacan argues that perverse subjects set themselves up as the instrument of the mOther's *jouissance*, find their own enjoyment in serving this purpose, and very seldom doubt this role. It is very rare for perverse subjects to seek psychoanalytic treatment intentionally.

Neurosis and 'object a'

Although the *neurotic structure* describes so-called normal subjectification, most children do not suffer from symptomatic neurosis. This is because most are able to find a small, undercover outlet for the desire that has been forced to go underground. Lacan calls this **object a** (Fink, 1995:59–60; 83). Lacan worked on this concept from so many perspectives, revised it so extensively and gave it so many other names, that it becomes a labyrinth in its own right. 'Object a' is usefully understood as a small trace, or residue, of the mother-child unity. The successfully separated subject unconsciously clings to this unity represented by the fundamental fantasy because it offers a sense of wholeness. In relation to 'object a', the subjects allow themselves a small opportunity to indulge the illusion of wholeness. Anything can function as 'object a' for a person. It is the source of maximum excitement for a person, arousing desires that can be accompanied by a fleeting sense of fulfilment and wellbeing, or slip over to disgust and even horror. 'Object a' remains secretive, often operating under cover, because it transgresses the *Nom-du-Père* (or, at least, it transgresses what the subject thinks this is).

KEY TERM

object a: an object that a person clings to as a small residue of the mother-child unity, which allows him or her occasionally to indulge the illusion of wholeness

Activity

Find examples of things that have functioned as '*object a*' for characters in movies and literature.

Obsessive and hysterical egos

The most common and easily recognisable neurotic structures are those of **obsessive and hysterical subjects** (Fink, 1997: 117–163). The clinical pictures of these structures are much more complex, but we will take a brief look below at how obsessive and hysterical egos might begin to form on the basis of opposing fundamental fantasies.

KEY TERM

obsessive and hysterical structures: the most common forms of the neurotic structure in Lacanian theory

People who adopt an obsessive structure tend to identify the whole with the ego. A sense of lack is interpreted as a profoundly lost object, of which the breast is the stereotypical example. Desire in obsessives becomes the desire to re-find this one thing that will finally make them feel whole again, so restoring *jouissance* (Fink, 1997: 118; 124). An obsessive child takes the mOther's desire into account because she controls access to the lost object, and must be seduced, manipulated or threatened into offering it up. Obsessive subjects are intensely interested in the mOther's desire because it must be neutralised so that it does not stand in the way of attaining *jouissance* (Fink, 1997: 119). Obsessive subjects quite easily renounce this interest in manipulating the mOther once the person performing the function of the *Nom-du-Père* (see below) reduces or disvalues her power and offers its own promise of genuine access to the lost object through social interaction (for example, in financial or political power, sexual success or creative work). But nothing will ever produce lasting satisfaction. Nothing matches the profoundly lost object, since it is the delusional pseudo-memory of a past possession that was never actually possessed. Tacitly *forgetting* this, obsessives blame their lack of *jouissance* on the mOther, and later on the external environment since these are seen as blocking access to the desired object. Obsessives are far less concerned with the question of ego-identity (who am I?) than with the problem of what object will fill the void in their being. The primary question is how to prevent the void from becoming an overwhelming emptiness or, affirmatively, how to sustain one's being, make a mark, or leave a legacy (Fink, 1997: 122).

By contrast, hysterical subjects are fixated on the primary question of their own identity. Unlike obsessives who direct attention outwards towards the lost object, hysterics focus inwardly, directing attention towards becoming the kind of person that the mOther desires exclusively (Fink, 1997: 119–120). The basic structure of a hysteric's fundamental fantasy is that the mOther, or the world as a whole, lacks and I must be the one to restore things, if I could only work out what she/it needs (which is impossible). A hysteric's identity is established in response to what is wanted by the mOther (or the big Other), but it remains uncertain, since the Other's desire cannot be figured out. Tacitly, therefore, hysterics perceive a lack in the Other and see its restitution as the key to *jouissance*. Again, they are quite willing to renounce their intense interest in the mOther, when the *Nom-du-Père* reveals the significant other's impotence and offers the supposedly greater promise of attaining *jouissance* by pleasing a wider audience (Fink, 1997: 120). When hysterics transfer their desire for the Other's desire from the impotent, particularistic mOther to the more powerful wider context, the same inwardly-directed questions concerning ego-identity are generalised to authority figures of higher status: 'How can I become the person 'they' (teachers, analysts, lovers, and so on) most desire?'

Enrichment

Imagine an interpersonal relation between an obsessive and a hysteric (Fink, 1997:117–163). Obsessives select partners because they seem to hold the key to the ultimate, *jouissance*-promising object of desire. The chosen partner might be glorified as a creative muse, or credited with qualities or talents that underwrite sexual success or social power. Hysterics, by contrast, desire to be the source and master of their partner's desire. They 'get off' on a desire that deifies them as beautiful, fascinating or talented, feeling in its ambience as attractive as the partner portrays them to be. Hysterics remain vigilantly sensitive to the kind of person they think the other admires. Taking a partner's desire as an indication that he or she truly touches the inner core (the other knows me better than I know myself), hysterics strive to become that desired being.

Obsessives fabricate their beloved objects in tandem with hysterics, who desire only to become the object of desire. At face value, this looks like a combination that cannot fail. Do you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?

Some people argue that the hysterical structure is feminine and the obsessive structure is masculine. Critically discuss this claim in light of the Lacanian aphorism: 'there is no such thing as sexual rapport'.

The website below provides a discussion of this topic.

<http://www.lacanonline.com/index/2013/09/5-lacanian-cinematic-liches-that-hollywood-loves-v/>

KEY TERM

four discourses: the four fundamental, underlying structures (the Master, the University, the Hysteric and the Analyst) that describe a basic attitude towards the way 'the whole' should work, and the associated power relations that should structure groups

Social relations and the 'four discourses'

The *Nom-du-Père* offers the child a place in the social group, which is structurally set up in terms of **four discourses** (Fink, 1995:129–136). The four discourses describe the four fundamental, underlying structures (the Master, the University, the Hysteric and the Analyst) that describe a basic attitude towards the way 'the whole' should work, and the associated power relations that should structure groups.

These may be described briefly as follows:

- Groups caught up in the discourse of the Master insist that *the whole* is structured hierarchically, and groups need an authority figure who must be obeyed, without challenge. No rationale or justification is given for this hierarchical power; it just is. In this view, the master is the Phallus.
- Groups *captated* by the discourse of the University believe that the world is at bottom a rational order (a cosmos) and that rational, systematic knowledge of the way things work provides people with ultimate authority to govern the group. If a system requires a master or a master signified, knowledge and rationalisation will be used to serve this agenda and prop up the master. In this discourse the Phallus is the object of desire.
- The discourse of the Hysteric is the discourse of true science. The University discourse only offers a rationalisation that supports the status quo. By contrast, the Hysteric's discourse desires truth. However, it is the self-contradictory and uncertain nature of things that is recognised as the truth. In the Hysteric's discourse, any authority is constantly challenged because the Phallus is scorned as inherently lacking.

- The discourse of the Analyst is the final position offered by the Symbolic Order, and can only be adopted after the subject is able to traverse the fundamental fantasy. It is the end point of subjective development, and points to a position in which the person understands that the way of the world is complex, turns away from power, and neither believes in, desires nor resists the Phallus.

At the level of individual fundamental fantasy, those who have adopted a hysterical position in relation to the mOther will experience severe discomfort and dislocation in a community that obeys the Master's discourse (a tyranny of unquestioned power). They will feel equally uncomfortable in a community structured by the University discourse (which tries to use knowledge to support the status quo). Individual hysterics might feel at home in a situation of radical, revolutionary rebellion. But as soon as a cause is won, the hysteric will start questioning its legitimacy.

Individuals who have adopted an obsessive (universalist) position towards the mOther will experience severe discomfort and dislocation in a community that is ordered according to the Hysteric's discourse, which prefers a constant state of revolt, where everything is open to question. They are comfortable in a social world ordered according to the Master's discourse just as long as the master does not slip into irrational behaviour. If the master threatens clear, rationally organised boundaries, the master will be deposed for a better master.

Self-evaluation question

- Consider some of the groups that you belong to, for example, your religious or work community, your group of friends or your family. According to what discourse are these groups structured?

Activity

1. Give examples of communities that are mostly structured by the discourse of the Master, University, Hysteric and Analyst.
2. Consider the following political figures: What discourse best describes the basic attitude of each towards the way the group should work?
Pope John Paul 11, Che Guevara, Robert Mugabe, Mohandas Ghandi, Margaret Thatcher, Martin Luther King, Aung San Suu Kyi

The master signifier

In becoming subject to discourse, children absorb (sometimes unconsciously) the complex structural rules (Master, University, Hysteric or Analyst) that they must obey in order to be heard and recognised by the rest of the group. They must also negotiate the available, specific meanings given by existing discourses. This means coming to terms with the master signifier (or fundamental cultural or ideological principle) that defines the character of a community's social order. Examples of such master signifiers would be patriarchy, consumer capitalism, democracy, any religion and environmentalism.

8.6 Optimal development as subjectification

How does psychoanalysis help a subject to achieve optimal development?

8.6.1 Traversing the fundamental fantasy

While the construction of a fundamental fantasy in the Imaginary Order and the adoption of the *Nom-du-Père* in the Symbolic Order are necessary, these constructions can form stultifying traps and optimal subject formation requires a further step whereby the subject is able to gain distance from them. This is a difficult and uncomfortable process, where attunement to the Real is partially re-opened. For Lacan, this is where psychoanalysis can play a significant role.

Firstly, the subject must come to see that the question of cultural meaning is extremely complex. The *Nom-du-Père* offers a master signifier as the basic explanatory principle binding a group together. But this supposed explanatory principle turns out to be unfathomable due to the double or multiple nature of words and expressions. The master signifier is the principle that everybody ‘knows’ and nobody can precisely articulate (Žižek, 2006:10). We all know that there are such things as women, South Africans and whites, and we speak about them all the time, but who can define exactly what it means to be these people? Recognition of the enigmatic status of the big Other represents an uncomfortable crisis point from which many people flee. But if successfully negotiated, it promises genuine emancipation.

Secondly, at a deeper level, subjects must *traverse the fundamental fantasy* (Fink, 1995:65). An analyst can help analysands to traverse the fundamental fantasy by helping them demystify its workings. In this work of *subjectification*, analysands cannot deny or change their fundamental fantasy. However, all personality structures are an ambivalent mix of negatives and positives. Psychoanalytic traversing or working through is a matter of recognising the structure operating behind its particular manifestation in a subject. Then, instead of letting the alien, unconscious desire direct every move, analysands learn to take responsibility for it and make it their own. This is what Lacan means by the aphorism ‘assume your desire’. Finally, analysands work towards alleviating the desire’s negative effects and promoting its positive effects.

8.6.2 The analyst’s discourse and the ontological Real

What, finally, is the optimal development of the personality? Lacan does not expect the final goal of Lacanian analysis to be different from any other kind of therapy. He announced simply that analysis has achieved its therapeutic goal when a person is enduringly happy to be alive (Fink, 2007:57). Optimal development of the person, however, goes beyond this. An optimally developed person is one who has assimilated what he calls the discourse of the analyst. In brief, people come to occupy the discourse of the analyst when they turn their backs on their desire for power and are able to subvert their own tacit attempts at domination and mastery in any form. This sounds simple, but it presents itself in truth as one of the highest challenges faced by humans. People who have achieved this state are able to attune themselves, without dread, to the *ontological Real*.

A sense of the ontological Real emerges at the end of subjective development, when our powers of perception and comprehension have reached their highest capacity. The more extended in reach these powers become (think of microscopes and telescopes), the clearer it becomes to us how powerless we are to comprehend the Real world fully. The ontological Real can be thought of as absolutely everything that has happened, is happening and will happen anywhere. That thought is impossible to get your mind around. The Real world is far too much for our symbolic and perceptual schemas to cope with. It cannot be objectified. In response, we each configure reality as a manageable perspective on ‘what happens’. Although we share certain ways of constructing reality, each person uniquely screens perceptions and thoughts, giving attention to only a tiny proportion of these. All of us also adopt a pre-given language, which provides us with words and concepts to manage and control perceptual impressions (Fink, 1995:25). In short, for Lacan, the analyst is able to see that reality is socially constructed and the Real emerges along with symbolisation as that which cannot be represented or spoken about (Evans, 1996:159). We encounter this version of the Real when words and labels fail us. If you cannot imagine or talk about an event, it does not exist in your reality. But it might remain there ex-sisting in the Real as something unimaginable or unspeakable that has nevertheless happened. And this event, because it is there, without being acknowledged in images or words, will start interfering with your construction of reality in the form of symptoms.

The analyst is also able to see that both senses of the Real, as *jouissance* and the ontological sense, while different, share the enticing and threatening status of the outside. The Real as *jouissance* is associated with the desire for dissolution of the ego, and nostalgia for a return to a state of bliss. However, the desire for freedom from subjective limits equates with the dangerous desire for the release of death. Childhood fantasies of being devoured by the mOther are expressions of this, as is the thrill of ‘being on the edge’ between life and death. Exposure to the ontological Real threatens to disrupt carefully, protective constructions of reality, and the groundlessness of these evokes both nauseating terror and invigorating excitement. For the most part, people tend to keep their distance from these extreme encounters with both the death drive and the ontological infinite. Yet, for all their danger, the analyst is aware that such limited experiences are essential to help us subvert our desires for domination and mastery and keep us vibrant and healthy.

Self-evaluation questions

The Real is a complex concept that takes on different senses when it is described in different terms.

- What does the concept mean when it is described in terms of *jouissance*?
- What changes when it is described in ontological terms?
- What remains the same in these different versions of the concept?

8.7 Views on psychopathology

What are the main clinical structures in Lacanian theory?

Lacan distinguishes three main clinical structures: psychosis, neurosis and perversion (Evans, 1996:194–195). These are based on different fundamental mechanisms of negation. The psychotic structure develops as a result of ‘foreclosure’ (Evans, 1996), the neurotic structure develops as a result of ‘repression’ and the perverse structure develops as a result of ‘disavowal’. Every person can be categorised as neurotic, psychotic or perverse. Nobody can be both neurotic and psychotic.

Under these main categories, Lacanians list various sub-categories. The psychotic structure is divided between paranoia, schizophrenia and manic-depressive psychosis. Fink adds erotomania, melancholia and mania. The neurotic structure can be understood in terms of the differences between hysteria, obsession and phobia (Fink, 1997:116). The most common and most easily recognisable neurotic structures are those of obsessive and hysterical subjects (Fink, 1997:117–163). The most common perversion is fetishism (Evans, 1996:139; 63–64).

8.8 Implications and applications

How can Lacan’s theory be applied in therapeutic practice?

Lacanian theory is applied widely in the human sciences and philosophy in the interests of human self-understanding. The main application of Lacanian theory in the field of psychology is in psychoanalytic treatment. In approaching psychoanalytic treatment, analysts must be aware that language works differently in neurotic and psychotic subjects. In neurotic subjects, language use reflects the split between conscious and unconscious processing. This manifests, for example, in interruptions caused by emotional conflict and ambivalence, sensitivity to double meaning, innuendo, and the difference between literal and figurative meanings, and selective screening of current perceptions on the basis of expectations. Psychotic subjects, by contrast, tend to learn language by imitation of standard phrases. Further language use does not indicate unconscious processing. There is little ambivalence, expressions are taken at face value, or literally, and multiple or hidden meanings are not registered. Psychotic subjects also find it difficult to separate out what is relevant for a context and struggle to know what to expect (Fink, 2007:18–20).

The vast majority of subjects that practitioners will deal with are neurotics (Fink, 2007). While therapists will encounter psychotic subjects, Lacan agrees with Freud that the classical *talking cure* is not appropriate and a significantly different approach to treatment is needed. Similar caution applies to perverse subjects. Due to the relative rarity of this structure, and controversies surrounding it, treatment will not be discussed here (Evans, 1996: 140).

You may supplement the brief notes below with the series of four lessons from Lacan’s practice, found on the following website: <http://www.lacanonline.com/index/category/lacan/>

8.8.1 A Lacanian approach to the treatment of neurosis

The central aim of the psychoanalytic treatment of neurotics is to lead analysands to recognise the truth about their unconscious desire by articulating it in speech in the presence of another person. In naming and describing it publically, they give it presence in the world, whereas before it only ex-sisted in the Real, causing symptoms (Evans, 1996:36). Thereafter, the analyst works to help an analysand traverse or work through the fundamental fantasy to the point that symptoms are alleviated and happiness restored.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, it is extremely important that the analyst is not taken as a model to identify with (Fink, 2007:139). Identification with the analyst is considered to be a trap, leading the analysand only to further self-alienation. The analyst must carefully steer clear of the role analysands often try to impose: that of the all-seeing Other who is the ultimate judge of their value as human beings. It is important for analysands initially to believe that someone else has adequate knowledge to help them. To deny this outright, in an honest insistence that analysands have the internal resources to help themselves, is likely to be too disheartening at first. Analysts must, however, avoid serving the analysand as an Other with whom to identify, by refusing to reveal concrete information about their character, ideals, opinions and tastes. Analysts must remain equally vigilant concerning their own desires. To avoid subtly forming the analysand's desires on the model of their own, analysts must maintain their desires as constant enigmatic desires for something else (Evans, 1996:39-40).

The fundamental 'tools of the trade' for the treatment of neurotics are linguistic and, according to Fink (2007), consist of the following basic components.

Listening and hearing

To listen as an analyst, Fink (2007:1-23) argues, it is important to disrupt narcissistic listening habits, which ensure that we only really 'hear' those parts of another person's feelings, experiences and perspectives that we can locate within a personal framework of understanding. The rest is screened out. Listening to build an empathic alliance, to identify and understand, does not allow another person to really be 'other'. The harder you listen in this way, the less you will hear. Instead, listening is a matter of paying deep and serious attention to what a person is literally saying, without trying to understand too soon. The idea is to hear the words verbatim, without filling in gaps and picking up what you think the person probably meant to say. An analyst must also become adept at distinguishing between ordinary linguistic mistakes and Freudian slips. These are slips that indicate, through interference in what the analysand overtly says, what his or her desire wants. Minute attention should also be paid to repetitions, hesitations, silences, strange turns of phrase, multiple meanings, ambivalence, changes of speed, volume, tone, inflection, affect, too little sense, too much sense, and so on. Listening must occur without subtly producing the analysand's discourse by listening for specific things or offering a directive response through signs of

approval, disapproval, interest or boredom. Responses should be non-committal, unreadable, and reduced to the minimum needed to encourage the analysand to go on talking. A ‘hmmm’ sound is recommended.

Activity

Listen to the following interviews.

- Raw interview with Rachel Dolezal:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKRj_h7vmMM
 - Rachel Dolezal - Racial Fraud Psychology Explained
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsB6GXW7Wb0>
1. List the incidences that might indicate a discrepancy between what Rachel overtly says and what her desire wants. Compare notes with fellow students and colleagues.
 2. Try this with other broadcasts in which you are aware that the person is lying.

Self-evaluation question

- To what extent can you practise Lacanian psychoanalysis if analyst and analysand speak different languages? (See Fink, 2007:28–30.)

Questioning

The aim of asking questions, according to Fink (2007:24–35), is to facilitate movement when the analysand’s speech stalls, trails off, leaves things unsaid or skips over things. This is where resistances are indicated and the analyst’s own resistances might become apparent because pressing these will facilitate movement into uncomfortable spaces. The analyst must take care not to say too much. Questions can project the analyst’s own thinking into the process and put words into the analyst’s mouth. Silent questions through looks or gestures, such as a raised eyebrow, are best. More precise questions should be short. Even one word questions are highly effective. With longer questions, analysts should use the analysand’s words verbatim and avoid translating them.

Self-evaluation question

- Why should you repeat the analysand’s words verbatim and not translate them into your own terms?

Punctuation and scansion

Consider the following well-known word sequence (Wieringa, Moore & Barnes, 1998:54). With a few punctuation marks, you can turn this sequence into comprehensible sentences. Try it out.

That that is is that that is not is not is that it it is

Punctuation makes meaning (Fink, 2007:36–73). It can also modify or distort meaning if it is incorrectly placed. People punctuate their own speech in many

ways, for example, breaking words through pauses or hesitations, beginning in the wrong place, trailing off, breaking in the middle of sentences, stressing words, rushing through, mumbling, disclaimers and repeating. Very often such punctuation is unconscious; it functions symptomatically to both present and obscure the real meaning of the words. The analyst engages with this punctuation, trying to highlight it, in order to reveal what is being obscured by it. Analysts can also add punctuation by questioning pauses, stressing what was glossed over, slowing down a rush, clarifying what was mumbled or repeating ambiguous words.

Scanding is the act by which the analyst puts an end to the session. It is perhaps the most controversial aspect of punctuation. This is not only because the idea of a shorter session contravenes a contemporary economic discourse, in which ‘my money’s worth’ is measured in terms of time spent with the analyst, even if the time is unproductive. Interestingly, the longer sessions provoke no comment. More importantly, scanding reflects the analyst’s deliberate attempt to end a session at a point that will provoke the analysand to work during the time between sessions. This will often be at a disconcerting point of emphasis or ambiguity that suggests an unfinished task. It should be remembered that Lacan insists that the work done by the analysand is more significant than a secure, protective relationship with the analyst. However, as Fink (2007:52–53) points out, emphasis on ambiguity and disruption of habits is appropriate for work with neurotics, but not psychotics.

Interpreting

To work with interpretation, Fink (2007:74–100) argues that the fundamental principle is that moments of ‘truth’ for an analysand involve ‘the experience of symbolising what has never before been put into words’. Recall that ‘what has happened but has never been put into words’ defines the traumatic Real. Interpretation in the analytic situation aims at having an impact on the Real through verbalisation of what was previously unspeakable. The task is extremely difficult and interpretations are always risky. Often an interpretation seems to have hit the mark, only to seem lacking or limited further down the line. Also, verbalisation does not always make enough of an impact to effect a change in symptomatic or distressing behaviour. Knowing and observing unconscious patterns of thinking and behaviour is not always enough to shift the underlying desire driving them. Finally, an analyst’s interpretations might act as misleading suggestions that block work that needs to be done. There is much more to be said about this complex art, but the general idea is to foster independent and autonomous work in analysands, where they seek their own interpretations without needing validation from the analyst.

Working with dreams and fantasies

Dreams and fantasies, according to Fink (2007:101–125), produce most of the material in an analytic session. Through them, often skirting repressions, the unconscious provides snippets such as names, colours or smells associated with the

traumatic Real. Dreams, as Freud pointed out, are the domain where unconscious desires have a greater space for outlet. Censorship still operates and desires become manifest in dream states in ways that might seem counterintuitive and perverse once one is awake. However, a dream of punishment, for example, might not express a perverse desire to be punished, but the desire to do the thing that would elicit that kind of punishment. Working with these productions, again, is highly complex. The basic principle is to take each small component of a dream in itself as a point of departure for the work of free association, rather than expecting them to be coherent, make sense as a whole, or be direct and literal in their meanings.

Transference and countertransference

According to Fink (2007:126–188), *transference* and *countertransference* are used loosely to label any feelings an analysand might have about an analyst, and vice versa. In positive and negative transference relations analysands feel either passionate love or hatred for their analysts, seeing them as the primary source of or barrier to salvation. Following Freud closely, however, Lacanians insist that transference is more complicated (Fink, 2007:128). Transference is a repetition in the analytical situation of an earlier situation consisting of a complex configuration of elements that goes well beyond feelings. Countertransference is equally complex. For example, it could involve the repetition in the analytical situation of a configuration of issues related to a previous analysand. The basic principle in handling transference, according to Fink, is to avoid focusing too hard on it. Firstly, transference relations of love or hate can motivate analytical work and should only be discussed if the passions begin to block the work. Secondly, an analyst should avoid the temptation to focus on what the analysand's discourse implies about his or her own identity. This merely engages both parties in unproductive imaginary relations of ego-identity and rivalry.

Non-normalising analysis

Fink (2007:206–230) concludes with a warning to be wary of normalisation. He remarks on the irony that normalisation via categorisation has become a very important aspect of psychology in a post-modern context characterised by extreme sensitivity to 'the differences in perspective that arise from people's different sexual, racial, religious, cultural, economic and educational backgrounds', and a perspectivism that is 'highly attuned to the way people's experience of the world and of themselves is affected by origins, language and social milieu, which in turn determines their views on reality'. Analysts should be careful of making normalising remarks, for example: 'such fantasies are common; many people have them', or 'don't we all feel/act like that sometimes?' Fink (2007:219–222) also argues that it is dangerously normalising to use words such as 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' to qualify behaviour and affect, and analysts should be suspicious of normalising terms such as 'high functioning' and 'low functioning', 'reality-testing', 'disorder', 'dysfunction' and 'stress'.

Self-evaluation question

- How often do you use normalising words in your everyday life and work? Which do you rely on most? Can you add to the above list of normalising words?

In summary, because neurotics tend to suffer from defensive, inflexible dogmatism it is essential to practise a non-normalising analysis. It is far more difficult perhaps, but nevertheless preferable to strive for realism rather than normality, in the sense of aiming to reflect what really is the case (uncertainty or indecisiveness) as honestly and closely as possible.

8.8.2 A Lacanian approach to the treatment of psychosis

In the Lacanian tradition, there is a sharp discontinuity between neurotic and psychotic structures and the basic principles of treatment are very different (Fink, 2007:261). Further, the 'psychotic structure' takes on different forms, and each of these require carefully adjusted approaches. The information below is very schematic and only offers an indication of how a 'psychotic structure' in general terms differs from a 'neurotic structure'.

The form of an analysand's discourse can help therapists to detect a 'psychotic structure' (Fink, 2007:239). While psychotics make ordinary linguistic mistakes, due to the absence of repression, they make very few Freudian slips. While there are many signals of defensiveness in a neurotic's discourse, you hardly ever find these in a psychotic's discourse. Psychotics hardly ever say things like 'this is probably stupid, irrelevant, silly, pointless, but...' Psychotics do not tacitly deny things that nobody has ever accused them of in structures such as: 'I'm not sexist, but ...' Further, the idea that a single part of speech can have multiple meanings at the same time is just a matter of perplexity for a psychotic. Neurotics remain acutely conscious of the ambiguities of double-speak, a necessity in jokes, irony and politics. Psychotics, by contrast cannot say one thing and mean another. Their transference relationship with the analyst is not based on any belief that the analyst has access to hidden wisdom about their inner selves that they are yet to come to see. Instead, the psychotic expects instrumental knowledge from the analyst and useful tips about how to manage things better. Neurotics care about an analyst's interpretations, even if they challenge or reject them. A psychotic remains indifferent to them. Such analysands are simply not concerned with what the analyst knows or thinks. According to Fink (2007:247), transference in psychotics involves a passionate love or hatred for the analyst due to convictions that the analysand has formed about the analyst's intentions on the basis of previous experiences with others. Fink describes the most common forms as erotomania (the conviction that the analyst loves the analysand) or persecutory paranoia (the conviction that the analyst wants to exploit or destroy the analysand).

According to Fink (2007:231–237), the therapeutic techniques that work with neurotics do not work with psychotics, and can even be counterproductive. Psychotics make very few Freudian slips and listening for them, therefore, will not help the analyst. Also, non-committal, unreadable, minimal responses, which generate productive uncertainty in a neurotic, tend to produce suspicious anxiety in a psychotic. With psychotics, the analyst should be wary of pressing the kind of questioning that aims to uncover deeply hidden traumatic events. As Fink (2007:235) warns, this may push psychotic analysands towards the gaps in their symbolic universe that have been covered over by tying together ideosyncratic meanings, and trigger a psychotic break. Punctuation and scansion is supposed to highlight ambiguities and double meanings in the analysand's speech and use the analysand's uncertainties to provoke the unconscious into doing some associative work. In psychotics, such techniques provoke perplexity, annoyance and anxiety since there is no unconscious. Again, techniques of interpretation aim to bring to light unconscious desires that might contradict what the analysand is actually saying. Psychotic analysands often see such attempts at interpretation as invasive persecution and feel that the analyst is trying to get into their minds, to put thoughts in them that are not there.

8.9 Evaluation of the theory

What impact has Lacanian theory had on psychoanalysis?

The impact of Lacanian theory is extremely difficult to evaluate for a number of reasons. First, as mentioned, Lacan changed his ideas over his lifetime and sometimes contradicted earlier views in later writings. Further, Lacan produced so much writing and of such complexity that it has been used selectively to support different psychoanalytic approaches. There are at least a dozen different Lacanian schools and there are inevitable disagreements concerning theory and practice among them (Fink, 2007). Finally, the popularity and status of Lacanian psychoanalysis rise and fall with that of psychoanalytic theory in general.

The continued productivity of Lacanian discourse across the disciplines is a positive indication of its continued value for advanced critical thinking in the humanities, particularly in continental philosophy, literary theory and critical theory, including feminist criticisms and appropriations. In psychoanalytic circles, Lacanian theory has met with a mixed response, as indicated by its initial popularity in France, phenomenal contemporary growth in Europe and South America, but relative unpopularity in the English-speaking world (the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom). This might be due partly to the difficulty of Lacan's writing and the flawed English language commentaries (Fink, 2007), but it must also be partly due to the absence, until Fink's recent publication of the text referred to in this chapter, of a clear, useful, introductory level overview of Lacanian psychoanalytic technique.

8.10 Suggested reading

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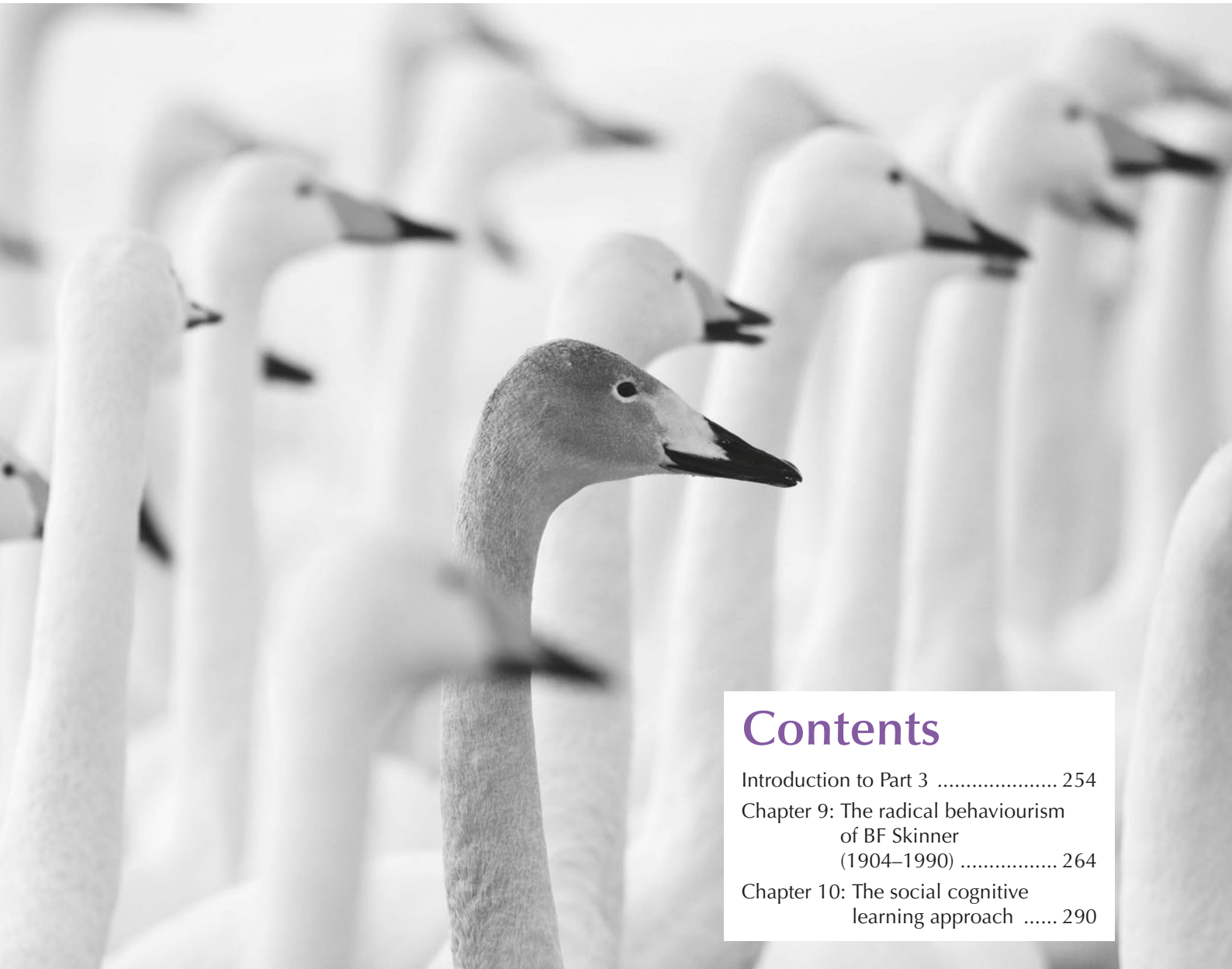
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PART 3

Behavioural and learning theory approaches

Werner Meyer



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Introduction to Part 3

1. Background

The theories we discuss in Part 3 all originate from one of the major schools of thought in the history of psychology, namely **behaviourism**. Accordingly, it is important to have a thorough understanding of this school of thinking. In this introduction we give brief attention to some of the forerunners of behaviourism and discuss the scientific philosophy of this school of thinking. This is followed by a short overview of the personality theories we deal with in this part.

2. Forerunners of behaviourism

Although behaviourism is essentially an American school of thought, its background reaches as far back as classical *Greek philosophy*. However, if we wanted to pinpoint more specific historical origins, we would refer particularly to the *British empiricism* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the *Darwinian theory of evolution* of the nineteenth century, and the research of *Russian physiologists* like Pavlov and Bechterev.

2.1 British empiricism

Empiricism is a view of humanity and of the nature of knowledge propounded especially by the British philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) (Plug, Meyer, Louw & Gouws, 1987). Basically, this view holds that at birth the human mind is without knowledge or any other content, and that all knowledge is acquired by means of sensory experience. It was Locke who used the famous image of the *tabula rasa*, or ‘clean slate’, to explain this condition, and he believed that all ideas, knowledge or other mental contents were the outcome of environmental influences.

This view forms one of the basic assumptions of behaviourism. Like the British empiricists, the behaviourists are extreme *environmental determinists*, and they therefore take particular interest in how the individual acquires behaviour. In fact, extreme behaviourists such as Watson and Skinner take this view even further, in that they believe environmental influences account for all of an individual’s attributes and behaviour, not just his or her knowledge, and that genetic factors play a minimal role in this regard.

Behaviourism is indebted to the British empiricists for certain other ideas as well, such as *elementalism* and *associationism*. The empiricists held that, like chemical substances, all mental contents are composed of elements that are linked together (see 4.3). The ‘elements’ of the mind are individual experiences that are associated with one another according to certain laws. In terms of the law of contiguity, for example, two ideas that are regularly experienced as directly following one another – such as thunder and lightning – become associated with one another, so that when we think of thunder we automatically think of lightning as well.

The behaviourists adopt the same elementalist and associationist forms of thinking, and hold that behaviour consists of small parts, namely stimuli and responses, which become associated with one another on the basis of certain laws of learning.

2.2 Evolutionism

The behaviourists fully accepted Charles Darwin's (1809–1882) **theory of evolution**, particularly his assertion that humans are the culmination of a process of evolution and that they therefore originate from animals (see Enrichment). For the behaviourists, this implies that human behaviour can be explained along the same principles as the behaviour of the lower animals and should be studied in the same way. They therefore had no qualms about using animals as experimental subjects in their research projects, and then drawing conclusions about human behaviour from their findings. In fact, extreme behaviourists often prefer to conduct research on mice and pigeons, not just because this is cheaper than using human experimental subjects, but also because they can exercise more control over the experimental situation and are less constrained by ethical considerations and moral standards. In behaviourist literature, the terms 'person', 'individual' and 'personality' are therefore rarely encountered. Their preferred term is 'organism', which may refer to humans or animals.

Enrichment

The essence of the theory of evolution

According to the theory of evolution, biological species develop as a result of two simultaneous processes: 'blind' gene mutations which take place during the normal process of reproduction, and environmental selection based on the principle of survival of the fittest or most viable. We can explain this as follows:

In the course of normal reproduction, each species produces offspring that have more or less the same genetic structure as the parents, but which nevertheless display slight differences. Some of these differences arise from 'accidental' changes in the genes. These are called *gene mutations*. Each reproductive member of a species produces a large number of descendants, of which only a small proportion survives. Think, for example, of the abundance of saplings that spring up under a large tree and die before they reach maturity. If we look at the immense number of descendants produced in one generation, or one season, by a whole species (mice, for argument's sake), we could say that, generally speaking, those that survive are better suited to the particular environment in which the species occurs. In other words, the environment determines which of the descendants survive. If any of the genetic changes that occur lead to improved survival potential and further reproductive potential, those genetic types will eventually become the dominant type, while less viable types will eventually become extinct. The changes that take place in this way do so extremely slowly, and cannot be observed during the course of a single lifetime. Evolutionists actually think in terms of millions of years.

An important implication of evolutionary theory is that the individual members of a species cannot foresee or plan what genetic changes they will produce. The ancestors of the giraffe did not decide, at a given point, to develop a long neck and thus set about producing the appropriate mutations.

(continued)

According to evolutionary theory, a large number of divergent mutations took place over a long period of time, and of these a small proportion gradually brought forth the attribute of long necks. Because of the nature of the environment in which giraffes developed their long necks, this ‘accidental’ change towards long necks was successful in that it led to improved chances of survival, while other mutations were unsuccessful and became extinct.

Another important conclusion drawn by evolutionists was that, since the physical world is subject to huge changes over long periods of time (for example in temperature, humidity and vegetation), and since these changes cannot be foreseen by the individual members of a species, the production of divergent gene mutations is essential for the survival of a species. The greater the variety of the mutations, the greater will be the chance of one of them being adaptive to the changed future environment. This is why evolutionists talk of random changes based on the trial-and-error principle.

To summarise: A species produces many descendants, all of whom, in a trial-and-error fashion, differ from one another in small ways. The environment determines which specific descendants can survive and continue with further propagation. In terms of the theory of evolution, then, the development of a species occurs simply in terms of better adaptation to the changing environment.

2.3 Pavlov: The discoverer of classical conditioning

Although the founding of behaviourism is usually linked to the name of the American John Watson, many of the basic principles had already been published before Watson’s time by a group of Russian researchers – the physiologist Ivan Sechenov (1829–1905), the psychiatrist Vladimir Bechterev (1867–1927) and, most notably, **Ivan Petrovich Pavlov** (1849–1936), who was also a physiologist (Leahy, 2013). Pavlov, in particular, made a considerable impact on the development of psychology with his discovery of **conditioning**.

Enrichment

Pavlov’s classical conditioning

In the course of his research into physiological aspects of digestion, for which he received the Nobel Prize in 1904 (Flugel & West, 1964), Pavlov noticed that the dogs that he was using as experimental subjects salivated when they were given food. Later, however, he established that the dogs began salivating even before they had received any food. He studied this phenomenon closely, and discovered that any neutral stimulus, such as a bell, which initially did not elicit the salivatory reflex, was sufficient to evoke a flow of saliva if, on a few occasions, it was presented at the same time as the food (Perkins, 1980). Pavlov called this the *conditioned reflex* because salivation is an involuntary reflex to food.

Pavlov and his co-workers, and those who succeeded them, studied this phenomenon exhaustively, and in so doing they developed various concepts that play an important role in behaviourist theories. Examples of these are *reinforcement*, *extinction*, *generalisation* and *discrimination* (Pavlov, 1960; Perkins, 1980; Hergenhahn, 1994).

3. A few important figures in the further development of behaviourism

Behaviourism was, for many years, the dominant approach in American psychology. Its influence also spread throughout the world. Although during the thirties psychologists stopped regarding and describing themselves as members of specific schools of thought (Chaplin & Krawiec, 1974), behaviourism continued, even then, to exercise considerable influence on psychological thinking and research (Brennan, 2002; Leahy, 2013). This influence covered a wide field, and is evident particularly in the emphasis that is placed on objective, controllable methods in psychological research, in psychotherapy (for example, *behaviour modification* as a psychotherapeutic approach), in teaching (for example, the emphasis placed on specific, attainable goals) and in the importance of learning as a research topic in contemporary psychology (Sahakian, 1976). It is not our purpose, in this introduction, to attempt an analysis of the great variety of hypotheses, research studies, approaches and theories in the broad field of behaviourism, but simply to draw attention to a few central figures and their contributions. One of the core ideas which we would like to convey and illustrate is the development that took place in behaviourist thinking, from a strong, objectivist behaviourism to a more 'subjective' type of behaviourism in which references to unobservable factors within the individual have a place. We then illustrate this developmental trend in more detail in the separate chapters of Part 3, with reference to the theories of Skinner, Rotter, Bandura and Mischel.

3.1 John Watson: The first spokesperson for behaviourism

John Watson (1878–1958) is usually regarded as the *father of behaviourism*. It is, however, more accurate to see him as the person who drew dramatic attention among psychologists in general to a set of ideas which he shared with some of his contemporaries and predecessors. He announced the behaviourist point of view in 1913 by means of an article entitled *Psychology as the behaviorist views it*. The tenor of this article (1913) is demonstrated in the following extracts:

Psychology as the behaviorist views it is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior. Introspection forms no essential part of its methods, nor is the scientific value of its data dependent upon the readiness with which they lend themselves to interpretation in terms of consciousness. The behaviorist, in his efforts to obtain a unitary scheme of animal response, recognizes no dividing line between man and brute. The behavior of man, with all its refinement and complexity, forms only a part of the behaviorist's total scheme of investigation.

It is possible to write a psychology, to define it (as the science of behavior), and never go back upon the definition, never to use the terms consciousness, mental states, mind, content, will, imagery, and the like ...

Watson (1930:104) also proclaimed an *extreme behaviourism*, most notably in the following, much-quoted statement:

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors.

Besides the publications in which he presented behaviourism as a school of thought and a research programme, probably the most important reason for Watson's fame is an experiment he carried out with Rosalie Rayner to show that Pavlov's conditioning method is also effective with humans (Watson & Rayner, 1920).

Case study

Using classical conditioning, Watson and Rayner conditioned a nine-month-old boy (known as Little Albert in the literature) to fear white mice, and then found that this fear had generalised to other white objects, such as rabbits and Father Christmas's beard. They planned to extinguish the fear by means of de-conditioning (that is, to form associations between pleasant experiences and white objects), but Albert's mother, quite understandably, removed him from the hospital (Harris, 1979; Samelson, 1980)! Watson's ideas about the deconditioning of fear responses were not empirically demonstrated until 1924, by Mary Jones (Jones, 1924; Harris, 1979).

3.2 Thorndike: The discoverer of instrumental conditioning

Edward Lee Thorndike (1874–1949) is often described as the greatest learning theorist of all time (Hergenhahn, 1994). He was an exceptionally versatile researcher and theorist, but was known particularly for his extensive research into learning in animals (especially cats) and his attempts to develop a theoretical explanation for learning phenomena.

In his research, he used an apparatus which is known as the *puzzle box*. This box was designed in such a way that an animal placed inside it could escape by pulling a chain or depressing a lever. Thorndike observed, in repeated experiments, how his experimental animals started by carrying out random acts until they accidentally opened the door and were able to escape. On successive repetitions of the experiment, the correct movement was performed earlier and earlier, and eventually as soon as the animal was placed in the box. This form of learning was initially described simply as *trial-and-error learning*, but later became known as *instrumental conditioning*. (Skinner later used basically the same form of conditioning, but called it *operant* conditioning. He also used an apparatus similar to the puzzle box, which is called the *Skinner box*.)

Thorndike uses essentially the same methods of conditioning as Skinner was later to use. However, the two theorists differ radically in their explanations of conditioning: while Thorndike offers a complex explanation in the shape of *connectionism*, Skinner contents himself with the simple empirical observation that learning takes place. Thorndike's form of behaviourism can, to some extent, be described as a 'subjective' behaviourism, because in his explanation he refers to certain processes that take place within the organism – namely neural connections, needs and satisfaction of needs. Skinner's behaviourism, by contrast, can be described as an 'empty organism' theory because he consistently avoids such references.

3.3 Hull: The father of the drive reduction theory

Clark L. Hull (1884–1952) is credited with developing the *first systematic theory of learning* (Hergenhahn, 1994). With his concepts of **needs**, **drive** and **drive reduction**, he takes ‘subjective’ behaviourism several steps further. His highly complex theory is built on the hypothetico-deductive model. This means that it consists of a number of postulates from which empirically testable hypotheses are derived. His theory exerted considerable influence, particularly on research into learning, but also on the development of Dollard and Millar’s moderate behaviourist personality theory (Engler, 1985). Hull’s most significant contributions may be summarised as follows:

- He developed the concept of *innate* (that is, not learnt) *response hierarchies*. He believed that children are born with hierarchies of responses which are activated by needs. If the first response in such a hierarchy does not lead to satisfaction of the need, the second response in the hierarchy is activated automatically, and so on. The response, which leads to need satisfaction, moves up in the hierarchy and, as a result of learning, the innate response hierarchy is gradually changed.
- The concepts of ‘needs’ and ‘drive’ are central to his theory. When an organism has a need, the organism is spurred to action by a drive. The greater the need, the stronger the drive.
- Hull uses the term *reinforcement* to refer to the process whereby a connection between a stimulus and a response is formed. An *S-R connection* is established when the stimulus concerned is closely followed by a response and subsequent drive reduction. For example, when a dog hears that its food dish has been picked up in the kitchen (stimulus), and runs to the kitchen (response), where it soon receives food (drive reduction), the sound of its food dish being handled will in future again result in the dog running to the kitchen. Hull thus regards both contiguity (sequence in time) and drive reduction as focal to the process of reinforcement. He also distinguishes between *primary* and *secondary* reinforcers. A primary reinforcer is a stimulus that satisfies a real physical need, while any stimulus that is regularly and consistently associated with the satisfaction of a need may become a secondary reinforcer. Food is thus a primary reinforcer, while stimuli such as the smell of food or the sounds that signal mealtime are secondary reinforcers.
- Hull calls the connection between a stimulus and a response a *habit*. The stronger the connection, the greater the strength of the habit.
- The probability that the organism will behave in a certain way is the outcome of both the drive strength and the strength of the habit. Hull calls this the *reaction potential*.

3.4 Tolman’s cognitive and purpose behaviourism

Although **Edward Chace Tolman** (1886–1959) chose to focus on research with animals, he made several further contributions to the development of ‘subjective’ behaviourism. As the title of his major work (*Purposive behavior in animals and men*, 1932) suggests, he moves away from the radical behaviourists’ emphasis on external stimuli as determinants of behaviour. Not only does he acknowledge that **behaviour**

is **purposive**, he also includes **cognitive** and **Gestaltist concepts** in his explanation of learning (Sahakian, 1976), and can therefore be regarded as a precursor to the **social cognitive learning theory** discussed in Chapter 10. His use of such concepts is always within the broad context of behaviourism, however, or more specifically of a type of behaviourism, which he himself called *operational behaviourism*. Within this framework he consistently tried to define each concept operationally.

4. Behaviourism's philosophy of science

Behaviourism has a particularly strict view of science. In fact, it is fair to say that some behaviourists are more concerned about producing scientifically unassailable results than about knowing and understanding the human being as a whole. Their view of science is moulded by their study of the **philosophy of science** of the late nineteenth century, which is based on the principles of *positivism* and *empiricism*, and in which the natural sciences, particularly physics, are taken as the model for all scientific endeavour. Although contemporary natural scientists themselves no longer adhere strictly to this philosophy (Leahy, 2003), many behaviourists still regard this as the ideal that psychology should pursue. This is an extremely limiting standpoint, which places much that is studied by psychologists and personologists beyond the bounds of the strict behaviourist. Any view of science can be described in terms of four points, namely the prescriptions it makes as to:

- the **object(s)** that science should study
- the **methods** that science should use
- the thinking that may and should direct the **theoretical explanation** of the phenomena that are studied
- what the **goal** of scientific endeavour should be.

We shall therefore describe behaviourist scientific philosophy in terms of these points.

4.1 The object of study: Observable behaviour

According to *positivism*, science can concern itself only with *knowable matters*, and from the *empiricist point of view*, these are matters that can be *perceived with the senses*. Unobservable phenomena, such as thoughts, feelings and values and conscious and unconscious experiences, are therefore regarded as inaccessible to scientific study. Behaviourists, particularly **radical behaviourists**, therefore study only **observable behaviour** and prefer to study the behaviour of animals rather than that of people. The acceptability of animals as objects of study is, of course, strengthened by the fact that behaviourism is based on the evolutionist standpoint.

Although moderate behaviourists and social cognitive learning theorists generally accept this positivist prescription in principle, many are, nevertheless, prepared to study unobservable or 'subjective' issues such as expectations and values. They try, however, to abide by this prescription by defining the concepts involved precisely, by using operational definitions whenever possible (that is, definitions that specify exactly how a given concept is measured), and excluding the researcher's subjective judgement as far as possible, for example, by using independent observers.

4.2 The method: Objective observation

In line with the positivist and empiricist prescription that only what is observable may be studied, behaviourists also accept that **objective, sensory perception** is the only reliable method of accumulating knowledge. This implies that the results of rational thinking are regarded as mere theory, which cannot be taken as knowledge until it has been verified or established by means of empirical observation.

It is on these grounds that behaviourists rejected introspection, which had previously been psychology's primary method, and upheld in its place the objective observation of behaviour as the only permissible method of psychology. Gradually, however, they began using more sophisticated methods than simply direct observation of behaviour. Thus, for example, behaviourists make maximum use of mechanical or electronic registering devices in order to eliminate the possibility of subjective observation. They also use apparatus that can register small physiological changes, muscle movements or nerve impulses that cannot be observed by the naked eye. The use of such devices means that the range of observable behaviour can be expanded considerably.

In the course of time, the field of study of behaviourism was broadened, particularly by its moderate proponents, by the acceptance of the operationalist view (Stevens, 1963), which led to all kinds of interesting developments. Emotions – previously banished on the grounds of their subjective and unobservable nature – were thus readmitted to the field of study by defining emotion operationally as subjects' verbal reports of their emotional experiences, or as scores in tests designed and standardised for the purpose of measuring emotions, or as a change in the electrical resistance of the skin, which is measured by means of a galvanometer.

4.3 Methods of theoretical explanation: Elementalism and reductionism

The **elementalist** standpoint holds that a phenomenon is explained by analysing it until its smallest, simplest building blocks – its basic elements – have been uncovered. Once this has been done, it can be shown how the elements are put together to make up the phenomenon in question. Chemistry and physics are typical of the sciences that function according to this elementalist conceptual model. Thus chemists regard matter as consisting of certain elements that have combined with one another.

The behaviourists apply elementalist methods of explanation to psychology, and view behaviour as consisting of two types of element, namely stimuli and responses, which are combined with one another through the organism's learning experiences.

Positivism also inclines towards **reductionist** and **materialist** conceptualisation (see Chapter 2). In line with this, some behaviourists try to explain all behaviour reductionistically by narrowing it down to a biological level. Thus, Watson asserts that thinking is no more than minimal movements of the speech organs, while Dollard and Miller (Engler, 1985) view behaviour as the result of biological drives.

Behaviourists are not all equally committed to reductionist thinking, however. Interestingly enough, the radical behaviourist, Skinner, provides no reductionist explanations, precisely because he deliberately avoids all theoretical explanations. The social cognitive learning theorists are also not prone to reductionism or materialism. Since they emphasise the interaction between biological and cognitive factors, they are not of the opinion that psychological phenomena can be explained in terms of biological factors alone.

4.4 The goal: Prediction and control

The explicit goal of positivist scientific practice is to **predict** and **control** relevant events. Accordingly, behaviourists are not concerned with understanding human beings as such. They are concerned purely with finding out what factors determine human behaviour and to use this knowledge to predict and control human behaviour. The work of Skinner best illustrates this pragmatic objective of behaviourism. We find that the moderate behaviourists accept and apply the principle of prediction and control less rigidly, while with the social cognitive learning theorists, we see that they even acknowledge some degree of freedom of choice, which naturally implies that behaviour cannot fully be predicted and controlled.

5. Preview of the personality theories stemming from behaviourism

The behavioural and learning theory models explained in this part share a number of common characteristics that distinguish them from other personality theories. The following are the most important unifying characteristics:

- **Research:** While most of the personality theories discussed in this book were developed on the basis of therapeutic experience, this group originates from research, particularly research into the learning process.
- **Learning:** Their basic assumption is that learning is the most important factor in the development of human behaviour and the formation of personality, although they do not ignore genetic factors. Differences between people are, therefore, ascribed primarily to the fact that individuals acquire different behaviours. We should note, however, that the various theorists we deal with in this part acknowledge and emphasise different forms of learning.
- **Environmental factors:** A further attribute is the emphasis on environmental factors, which are regarded as significant determinants of specific responses, as well as of the development of more permanent aspects of the personality. There are, nonetheless, considerable differences amongst these theorists as to the centrality of environmental factors.

The differences amongst this group of theorists are bound up with the fact that their allegiance to behaviourism is not equally strong. This is chiefly because of the impact of other schools of thought such as psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology and other person-oriented approaches, although insights gleaned from their own research have also had an effect.

Radical behaviourism is an attempt to explain all behaviour in terms of environmental variables alone, without any reference to factors within the individual. Burrhus Skinner is the most prominent modern representative of *radical behaviourism*, or *S-R psychology*. Essentially, he claims that all behaviour, with the exception of certain innate responses, is acquired through conditioning, and that psychology should focus exclusively on establishing the lawful relationships between stimuli and responses.

Over the years, more **moderate behaviourists**, often referred to simply as *learning theorists*, have made various attempts to expand behaviourism by also taking internal factors into account in their explanations of behaviour. Because allowance is made for the internal nature of the organism, the terms *subjective behaviourism* and *S-O-R* (stimulus–organism–response) *psychology* are also used when referring to this orientation. The theory of John Dollard and Neal Miller (1950) is representative of moderate behaviourism, as they combine behaviourist and Freudian principles and concepts in their personality theory. They therefore incorporate certain subjective factors, such as drives and conflict, in their explanation of human behaviour, but they do so as far as possible within the framework of behaviourist principles, such as environmental determinism and the emphasis on observable behaviour. Although we do not discuss the theory of Dollard and Miller (1950), it is of historical importance since it represents a bridge between the radical behaviouristic views discussed in Chapter 9 and the social cognitive learning theories discussed in Chapter 10.

The **social cognitive learning approach** (Chapter 10), is the outcome of further attempts to broaden behaviourism so as to include subjective factors. This broadening process has, over the years, taken a number of directions. Some ideas have, for example, been taken from other theories such as those of Rogers and Kelly. New explanations for behaviour have also been discovered as a result of these theorists' own research, however. The psychologists who take this approach to the study of human behaviour often refer to themselves as *social learning theorists* (because, apart from conditioning, they also acknowledge and examine other forms of learning, such as the imitation of models). They may also describe themselves as *social cognitive learning theorists* (because they acknowledge and examine a variety of cognitive factors, such as the person's perceptions, expectations and values). These psychologists are also known for their insistence that behaviour is the result of an interaction between the person and the situation, and they are thus also sometimes referred to as **interactionists**.

Although they diverge markedly from the behaviourist viewpoint in many respects, they do still fit into this part of the book by virtue of their emphasis on learning and of their decided methodological preference for the study of observable behaviour. Since there is no single person who incorporates and co-ordinates all the aspects of social cognitive learning theory, we concentrate on the work of three leading figures, namely Julian Rotter, Albert Bandura and Walter Mischel.



Chapter 9

The radical behaviourism of BF Skinner (1904–1990)

Werner Meyer and Cora Moore

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9.1 Outcomes

- Explain how Skinner's ideas about evolutionism and environmental determinism influenced his view of the functioning human being.
- Understand, according to Skinner, how behaviour is acquired (learnt) through the processes of respondent and operant conditioning.
- Understand the advantages and disadvantages of different schedules of reinforcement.
- Realise the value of Skinner's behaviour theory for various contexts.

9.2 Background

Can Skinner's theory be regarded as a personality theory in the true sense of the word?



Burrhus Frederic Skinner
Source: Public domain

Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904–1990) constructed a *radical behaviourist theory* in which behaviour is explained as the *lawful result of environmental factors*. Skinner's theory is entirely different from other personality theories. While others regard factors within the person as determinants of behaviour, Skinner tries to replace these so-called 'mentalistic' explanations with environment-oriented explanations. In fact, if we were to specify that personality theories should explain what happens within the person, Skinner's theory would not qualify for inclusion in this book. However, if we define a personality theory as any attempt to provide an explanation of human functioning in general, Skinner's explanation not only qualifies; it must, in fact, be regarded as one of the most influential theories of human functioning. Skinner himself sees his theory as an alternative to conventional personality theories in that he tries to offer an explanation for all behaviour from a completely different perspective. He simply tries to show the lawfulness of behaviour, as far as possible without making reference to factors within the organism such as characteristics or drives. Instead of understanding behaviour as the result of internal factors, he attempts to base his explanation on the effect of environmental influences.

How is Skinner's theory influenced by environmental factors?

Skinner grew up in a stable, loving, but strict home in Pennsylvania. As a child, his interest was captivated by building things such as wagons, merry-go-rounds and model aeroplanes. He even constructed a steam-driven cannon with which he could shoot plugs made of potatoes over the neighbours' houses (Schultz & Schultz, 2012). He was a good student and took a great deal of interest in music and other extra-curricular activities. He obtained a BA degree in English literature in 1926 at Hamilton College, but often found himself in trouble for playing pranks aimed at bringing 'arrogant lecturers' down a peg or two. He was even threatened with expulsion (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992).

On completion of his BA, Skinner wanted to become a writer. His efforts failed, and this led to a serious identity crisis and a loss of self-confidence (Elms, 1981; Skinner, 1976). He finally overcame this crisis by reading the work of Pavlov and Watson, and in 1928 he registered at Harvard for postgraduate studies in psychology.

He devoted himself to his studies with great discipline, and in 1931 obtained a doctorate. He subsequently followed a tremendously successful career as a lecturer and researcher, mainly at Harvard University. Although his work was always characterised by an objective and scientific approach, his inner unrest and desire to become a novelist emerged again in 1945 (Schultz & Schultz, 2012). During this period, he wrote his well-known work, *Walden Two* (1948a), in which he described an imaginary society controlled according to the principles of operant conditioning.

Skinner is not only one of the world's most famous, and most controversial, psychologists – several awards were also conferred upon him for his work. He was, for example, one of the few psychologists to receive the American government's highest accolade for scientific contributions – the *Medal of Science*. He also received the highest tokens of recognition of the American Psychological Association – in 1958 the *Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award* and in 1971 the *Gold Medal Award*.

In view of Skinner's theoretical emphasis on environmental influences, it would be interesting to try to establish the extent to which his own life, especially his theoretical position, was determined by his environment. Of course, Skinner (1983) himself believed that his whole life could be explained in terms of environmental influences, and he quoted a number of examples of such influences. One of these (Skinner, 1967) was the strict upbringing he received which, he believed, strongly influenced his adult life. For example, when he was a young boy, his mother would consistently 'punish' him if he did not hang up his night-clothes in his cupboard, by calling him back and making him put them away. This eventually led him to construct an apparatus that would remind him to do this chore. He suspended a notice bearing the words 'Hang up your pyjamas!' in front of his door, with an arrangement of ropes and pulleys that automatically removed the notice as soon as he hung up his pyjamas on a hook in his cupboard. It is highly probable that the boy received a lot of praise (that is, positive reinforcement) for this innovation, and this may help to explain why Skinner later paid so much attention to the construction of apparatus for his learning experiments (such as the famous Skinner box and learning machines), and why he regulated his own life so strictly. According to Schultz and Schultz (2012), he organised his working environment in such a way that he went to bed at ten o'clock, got up again after three hours' sleep, and then walked to his office to carry on with his work. In order to regulate his life in this way, he slept in a specially designed cupboard in his study.

Yet there are aspects of his life where it is not so clear how the environment influenced him, or how a particular behaviour was reinforced. We might, for example, wonder why Skinner was so rebellious during his student days at Hamilton College, why he tried to become a novelist in the years that followed, why he was so shaken when he failed, why he turned to fiction writing again during the next crisis in his life in 1945 and, last but not least, why he brought about a revolution in psychology. Skinner could undoubtedly have carried out many an interesting debate with other psychologists, such as Freud, Erikson and Rogers, about how to explain these and other aspects of his life!

Self-evaluation question

- How are Skinner's own childhood experiences reflected in his theory?

9.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

How did Skinner view human nature?

Although Skinner does not actually put forward a *view of the person* – he prefers to write about behaviour, which he regards as psychology's object of study – it is evident that he does have a *view of humanity*, and that it is based on the principles of **evolutionism** (see Enrichment on 'The essence of the theory of evolution' in the Introduction to Part 3) and **environmental determinism**. He believes that humans, like any other organism, are the outcome of the process of evolution. There is thus no essential difference between humans and animals, or between human and animal behaviour, although human behaviour is more complex than animal behaviour. Since, in terms of the atomistic view of science to which Skinner adhered, it is preferable to start with the study of simple matters, he focused his research on the study of animal behaviour and did not hesitate to apply his findings to humans. In fact, he felt perfectly free to use them to make pronouncements on education, psychotherapy, war and other aspects of human life.

KEY TERMS

evolutionism: all organisms, including humans, are the outcome of evolution

environmental determinism: behaviour is determined by environmental factors beyond the organism's control

However, Skinner's use of evolutionism and environmental determinism takes him beyond just an abstract view of humanity. They are also expressed in his explanation of how behaviour is produced and acquired. Just as biological species produce new genetic types in a trial-and-error manner, some of which are successful and survive, so Skinner maintains that individual organisms produce a large variety of behaviours, some of which 'survive', which means that they are repeated and used again by the organism because they are 'reinforced', while others are not reinforced and are therefore not repeated. Skinner's acceptance of the evolutionist view means that he regards it as unnecessary to ascribe goal orientation and conscious planning to humans or, indeed, to any organism. The organism produces behaviour fortuitously, without planning, while the environment determines what behaviour will (or will not) be repeated in future.

Clearly, then, Skinner sees the human being as no different, in principle, from animals. The only important difference is that humans' genetic structure provides them with a wider repertoire of behaviours – in other words, they are able to produce a greater variety of behaviours.

Enrichment

We can summarise Skinner's view of humanity as follows:

- Humans, like any other organisms, produce behaviour and are controlled by the outcome of their behaviour in that the environment determines what behaviour will be acquired and repeated.
- All behaviour is lawful, and can therefore be controlled.
- Since behaviour is controlled by environmental factors, it can be manipulated by manipulating the environment.

In line with this, Lundin (1974), one of Skinner's disciples, defines personality as the way in which an individual organises behaviour specific to him or her that has been acquired during his or her development.

Skinner's view of human beings as organisms opens up a number of questions. For example, what does Skinner make of subjective matters such as conscious experience, and what is his position regarding human freedom?

Skinner does not deny that people experience feelings, perceptions, cognitions and goals consciously, but he believes that such experiences should not be regarded as causing or explaining behaviour (Skinner, 1974:246). In his early work, Skinner sometimes describes the personality as a 'black box', whose internal structure and functioning are not important to science, and are not even accessible to scientific investigation. He avoids the use of subjective matters such as feelings, consciousness, thoughts, needs, drives and objectives as explanations of behaviour. In his later work, however, we form the impression that he is no longer quite as radical as this. He no longer denies the accessibility of subjective matters, but he still refuses to regard them as acceptable scientific explanations of behaviour. He goes to a good deal of trouble to show how subjective matters such as these can be explained in terms of environmental variables (Skinner, 1974). He defines needs and drives, quite simply, as the period during which the organism is deprived of something which is important for its survival. For example, the longer the organism is deprived of food, the greater its need for food. Accordingly, Skinner now also links reinforcement with the objective fact of deprivation, and not with an unobservable need. (We will discuss this further in 9.5.)

From the general direction of Skinner's thinking, particularly his basic point of departure that behaviour is lawful and controlled by the environment, we can only conclude that he regards the human being as 'unfree' – that he believes humans have *no freedom of choice*. And indeed, Skinner tries, time and again, to reason away human freedom. He does so by showing, on the one hand, that people's 'choices' are

no more than operant behaviour (that is, behaviour for which the prior, causative stimulus is unknown; controlled by positive reinforcers of which the individual is unaware at the time. On the other hand, however, Skinner argues – and it is this that creates the problem of logic – that humans have designed and changed their environment in such a way that they have cut themselves loose from limitations and expanded their possibilities (Skinner, 1974:263). He also maintains that people can correct their errors, such as pollution and oppressive social systems, ‘and at the same time build a world in which he will feel freer than ever before and achieve greater things’ (Skinner, 1974:264). It is difficult to understand how beings whose behaviour is totally controlled by the environment can change their environment! This problem is dealt with further in 9.9.

Self-evaluation question

- How does Skinner view the functioning human being? Explain how evolutionism and environmental determinism influence this view.

9.4 The structure of the personality

Does Skinner identify any specific structural elements or ‘parts’ when explaining human functioning?

The task of psychology, according to Skinner, is simply to study the laws that govern the behaviour of the organism, and he is of the opinion that this task can be accomplished without any knowledge of the internal, subjective aspects of the personality. Consequently, he does not use any structural concepts in the usual sense of the word. For Skinner, psychology should study *behaviour* and the *environmental factors* that determine behaviour, and nothing else.

KEY TERMS

respondent behaviour: behaviour that is preceded and caused by a stimulus

operant (or emergent) behaviour: produced spontaneously by the organism. It has an effect on the environment and is controlled by this effect

stimulus: any observable object or change in the environment which precedes behaviour

Behaviour must therefore be regarded as Skinner’s structural concept, and it is important to note that Skinner makes a distinction between **respondent** and **operant** behaviour.

9.4.1 Respondent behaviour

Respondent behaviour refers to behaviour that is stimulated by something to which the organism responds. This ‘something’ that precedes (comes before) and controls the behaviour is called a **stimulus**. A stimulus, according to Skinner, is any observable object or change in the environment and the *response* is obviously the behaviour that follows the stimulus. The *stimulus* therefore causes the *response*. Skinner regards reflexes (for example, the blinking of the eyes in response to sharp light) as well as learnt (conditioned) responses (for example, the swift turning of the head when hearing the click of a gun) as respondent behaviour. He points out, however, that it is often impossible to distinguish between innate and acquired respondent behaviour, and that the distinction is therefore relatively unimportant (Skinner, 1953).

9.4.2 Operant behaviour

Operant behaviour, which is Skinner's main concern, is distinguished from respondent behaviour by two characteristics in particular. Firstly, it is not preceded by any specific identifiable stimuli, and it therefore appears to be produced spontaneously by the organism. For this reason, it is sometimes called *emergent behaviour*. Secondly, operant behaviour has an effect on the environment and is controlled by this effect (whereas respondent behaviour is controlled by the stimuli preceding it). When, for example, a pigeon 'accidentally' pecks at a red disk for the first time at the start of an experiment, this is regarded as operant behaviour because the pigeon produces it spontaneously. However, persistence in the behaviour is controlled by its effect on the environment: if the effect is that food drops into the cage, the behaviour is soon repeated; if it has no positive effect, the behaviour is not repeated soon, if at all.

KEY TERMS

discriminatory stimulus: a conditioned stimulus that leads to specific conditioned behaviour

response: behaviour that follows a stimulus

Enrichment

Although the essential theoretical difference between respondent and operant behaviour is clear, it is not always easy to distinguish between the two in actual practice. Operant behaviour may, after a while, follow specific controlling stimuli, and can thus function in the same way as respondent behaviour (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998). If the researcher should arrange matters in such a way that the operant 'peck against disk' is followed by food only if the disk was illuminated, for instance, the pigeon would gradually learn to peck only when the disk is illuminated. The behaviour of pecking against the disk has now changed into respondent behaviour, which occurs only after the conditioned stimulus of an illuminated disk. Skinner calls a conditioned stimulus that leads to specific conditioned behaviour a **discriminatory stimulus**. He adds that although operant behaviour is said to be an involuntary action, the behaviour is still caused by a stimulus; the stimulus is simply not as evident as a stimulus causing respondent behaviour.

It should be noted that Skinner uses the term **response** in two ways: sometimes as an abbreviation for respondent behaviour, and sometimes as a synonym for behaviour as an umbrella term for respondent as well as operant behaviour. In this chapter we give preference to the term 'behaviour' as an umbrella term for both respondent and operant behaviour, and we reserve 'response' for respondent behaviour and 'operant' for operant behaviour.

Self-evaluation question

- How would you distinguish between respondent and operant behaviour?

9.5 The dynamics of the personality

How does Skinner explain the dynamics of human functioning?

KEY TERM

reinforcement: occurs when an environmental condition or stimulus that follows behaviour increases the probability that the behaviour will be repeated

As motivation is something that occurs within the person, Skinner uses no motivational concepts whatsoever. He regards concepts that refer to subjective matters as mentalistic and unacceptable to science. Instead of speculating about motivation, he prefers to try to ascertain which environmental factors control behaviour. Skinner is primarily interested in one aspect of behavioural control, namely the acquisition of behaviour. We therefore now need to pay attention to his explanation of learning. Skinner provides an exceptionally simple and economical description of the learning process. He uses only two concepts to explain learning – **behaviour** and **reinforcement**. The organism learns by producing behaviour randomly, which subsequently may or may not be repeated, depending on the outcome of the behaviour. When behaviour is repeated or its frequency increases, Skinner says that it has been *reinforced* or *learnt*.

Skinner does not refer to any events within the organism in order to explain how and why behaviour is reinforced – he simply establishes the fact by empirical observation (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998). Neither does he try to explain why behaviour is reinforced by some consequences and not by others. He is satisfied with the empirical observation that certain consequences (such as the provision of food) lead to an increase in behaviour. The only explanation Skinner (1974) offers is that reinforcers are usually associated with the organism's survival.

After this preliminary survey of Skinner's view of the learning process we can now take a closer look at his views on respondent and operant conditioning.

9.5.1 Classical or respondent conditioning

KEY TERM

respondent conditioning: entails teaching the organism to associate a familiar response with a new stimulus

Skinner calls Pavlov's *classical conditioning* method (which is referred to in the Introduction to Part 3), **respondent conditioning** because this method entails teaching the organism to associate a familiar response with a new stimulus. This is done by repeatedly presenting the new stimulus together with another stimulus that automatically evokes the response concerned. This process of classical or respondent conditioning is illustrated in terms of Pavlov's experiment in Figure 9.1.

In Pavlov's experiment, food is the 'natural' or unconditioned stimulus (US) that leads to the unconditioned response or reflex (UR), namely salivation. A stimulus that does not lead naturally to salivation (for example a bell) is called a neutral stimulus (NS). When the neutral stimulus (bell) has been presented together with the unconditioned stimulus (food) a few times (NS+US), it is found that the dog salivates when the bell rings, before food has been presented. The previously neutral stimulus (the bell) has now become a conditioned stimulus (CS) that leads to salivation, which is now called the conditioned response (CR). Note that the same

response (salivation), which was previously the natural, unconditioned response to food, is now associated with a new stimulus (the bell) and the salivation is now called the conditioned response. The unconditioned and conditioned responses (salivation) are therefore identical and so are the neutral and conditioned stimuli (bell). However, the unconditioned stimulus (food) differs from the conditioned stimulus (bell).

Skinner is not, however, especially interested in classical or respondent conditioning. He maintains that it does not provide an explanation of the learning of new behaviour. All that happens is that an existing response is linked to a new stimulus. The organism learns to respond to a new stimulus, but the response itself is not new. For this reason, Skinner prefers to use operant conditioning, which can, he says, bring about the learning of new responses.

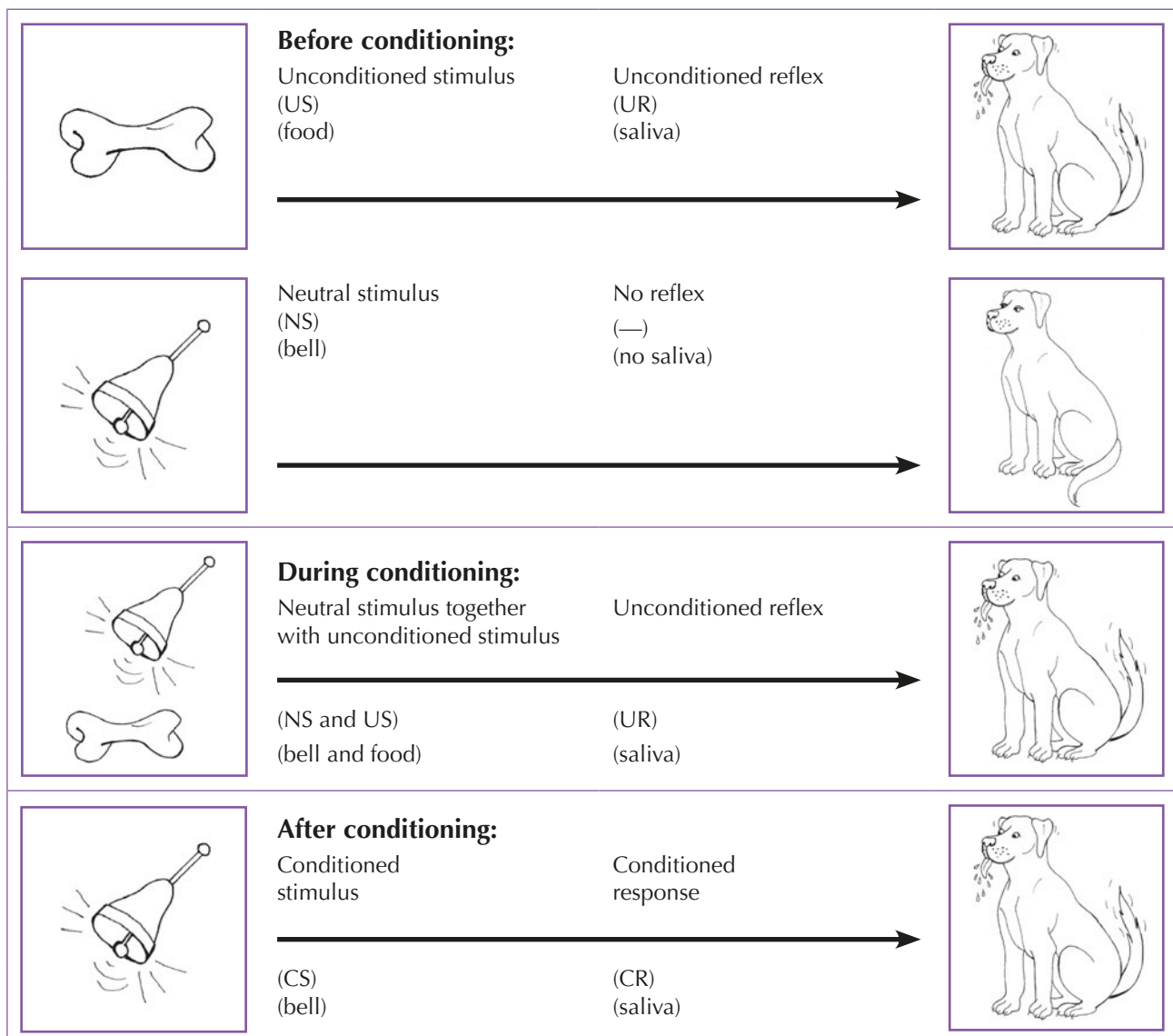


Figure 9.1 Classical or respondent conditioning illustrated in terms of Pavlov's experiment

KEY TERM

operant conditioning:
behaviour is controlled by
the stimuli that succeed it

9.5.2 Operant conditioning

With **operant conditioning**, behaviour is controlled by the stimuli that succeed (come after) it. We see examples of operant conditioning every day. If employees notice that their employer praises them or pays them extra when they work overtime, for instance, they are more likely to work overtime again in the future. However, if the result of their behaviour is negative (for example, if the employer shows no appreciation or is dissatisfied with their work), they will probably be less inclined to work overtime in the future. Skinner believes that new behaviour is acquired by means of operant conditioning.

Operant conditioning differs from classical or respondent conditioning. In respondent conditioning, an association is formed between a preceding stimulus and a response, whereas operant conditioning leads to an increase in behaviour because of a stimulus, or a change in the environment, that succeeds the behaviour. In other words, operant conditioning takes place when an organism produces behaviour that brings about a particular change in the environment and when the likelihood of repeating that behaviour is increased by this environmental change (Skinner, 1953:64). Stated in everyday language, it is simply a process whereby the organism learns to repeat behaviour that proves successful in satisfying a need, or which is experienced as positive or pleasant. Skinner, however, as a radical behaviourist, avoids subjective or mentalistic terms such as ‘need’, ‘satisfaction’, ‘positive’ and ‘pleasant’ (Skinner, 1974:22). He simply ascribes the fact that specific behaviour increases under certain conditions to *reinforcement*, without connecting it to drive satisfaction or any other explanation.

It is interesting to note that operant conditioning is essentially the same as Thorndike’s instrumental learning, which we mention in the Introduction to Part 3. The only difference between Thorndike’s and Skinner’s conceptions of this matter is simply that Thorndike offers an explanation in terms of connectionism and need satisfaction, while Skinner regards such an explanation as mentalistic, unnecessary and even undesirable.

Example

Operant conditioning

A typical experiment demonstrating operant conditioning would proceed as follows: A pigeon, which has been deprived of food for several hours, is placed in a specially designed experimental box or Skinner box. A feature of the box is that it has a mechanism that allows food to drop into the box when the pigeon pecks at or depresses a red disk. The mechanism can be adjusted so that the rate and pattern of providing food can be controlled.

The pigeon’s behaviour is closely observed to establish how often it produces a specific behaviour (for example, pecking at the red disk inside the box) before the operant conditioning commences.

(continued)

The frequency of responses per time unit (for example, the average number of pecks per minute) is called the behaviour rate, and the rate before commencement of conditioning is the baseline. When the baseline has been determined, the pecking behaviour is reinforced by providing food immediately after the behaviour occurs. Any increase in the behaviour rate is then regarded as the result of reinforcement.

This simple apparatus and procedure, varied as required, are used by Skinner and other behaviourists to study various aspects of conditioning, such as the effect of different types of reinforcers, different reinforcement schedules, the extinction of learnt behaviour, and the learning of complex behaviour through the process of behaviour shaping.

We consequently discuss some specific aspects of operant conditioning in greater detail.

Reinforcement and related concepts

Reinforcement, one of the core concepts in Skinner's theory, simply means that behaviour is established or, in other words, that it will be repeated in the future or that its frequency will increase. A *reinforcer* is therefore defined as any environmental condition or stimulus that increases the probability that a behaviour will be repeated when that condition or stimulus follows the behaviour. The reinforcement of behaviour can occur as a result of positive and negative reinforcement.

KEY TERM

positive reinforcement:

is aimed at increasing behaviour by administering a positive stimulus

negative reinforcement:

is aimed at increasing behaviour by removing an aversive stimulus

- **Positive reinforcement** occurs when a *positive* (pleasant) stimulus is *administered* (added) after the behaviour has been performed and the likelihood of that behaviour being repeated in future *increases*. For example, a pigeon that has been deprived of food for a short time accidentally pecks at a red disk and receives food – the positive stimulus. We then observe an increase in the operant of pecking at the red disk; or a boy who performs well at school receives a star in his book in order to increase the likelihood of his performing well in future.
- **Negative reinforcement** occurs when a *negative* (aversive or unpleasant) stimulus is *removed* (taken away) after the behaviour has been performed and the likelihood of that behaviour being repeated in future *increases*. For example, a pigeon in a cage continually receives light shocks through the floor of the cage. As soon as the pigeon accidentally pecks at a red disk, the electric current is switched off. We then observe an increase in the operant of pecking at the red disk; or if we find that a certain medication removes stomach-ache, the likelihood of our using that medication in future when we experience stomach-ache increases.

It is important to note that in both positive and negative reinforcement, the emphasis is on *reinforcing* behaviour and thus *increasing* specific behaviour. In the case of positive reinforcement, this is achieved by administering a positive or pleasant stimulus and in the case of negative reinforcement, behaviour is increased by the removal of an aversive or unpleasant stimulus.

In addition to the concept of reinforcement, Skinner also refers to *punishment* and *extinction*.

KEY TERMS

punishment: is aimed at *decreasing* behaviour by administering an aversive stimulus or removing a positive stimulus

extinction: occurs when behaviour decreases and eventually disappears because stimulation is withheld

- **Punishment** is aimed at *decreasing* behaviour. Punishment occurs as a result of one of the following two contingencies:
 - the *administration* of an *aversive* (unpleasant) stimulus after the behaviour has been performed in order to *decrease* the behaviour. For example, a pigeon's behaviour of pecking at a red disk decreases when it leads to an electric current in the floor of the cage being switched on; or a child is smacked after jumping on the sofa with muddy feet, in order to decrease the possibility of him or her jumping on the sofa with muddy feet in future.
 - the *removal* of a *positive* (pleasant) stimulus after the behaviour has been performed in order to *decrease* the behaviour. For example, removing the food from a pigeon's cage in order to decrease the pigeon's behaviour of pecking at a red disk; or punishing a child by not allowing him or her to watch a favourite television programme in order to decrease the child's naughty behaviour.
- **Extinction** occurs when a specific type of behaviour decreases and eventually disappears because *stimulation is withheld*; in other words, when it is followed by neither positive nor negative stimuli, for example, a pigeon's behaviour of pecking at a red disk decreases when it does not lead to any particular stimulus or environmental change.

The link below provides access to a Blog, *The Difference between Positive/Negative Reinforcement and Positive/Negative Punishment*, posted on February 05, 2013, which students may find informative.

<http://bcotb.com/blog/the-difference-between-positivenegative-reinforcement-and-positivenegative-punishment/>

Table 9.1 provides a summary of the processes of positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement, the two forms of punishment and extinction.

Table 9.1 Summary of positive and aversive stimuli

	Positive stimulus	Aversive stimulus
Administration	Positive reinforcement: behaviour increases	Punishment: behaviour decreases
Removal	Punishment: behaviour decreases	Negative reinforcement: behaviour increases
Withholding stimulus	Extinction: behaviour decreases	

KEY TERMS

primary reinforce: anything of biological value to the organism, such as food and water

secondary reinforce: a stimulus, for example money, which has acquired reinforcement value because of its association with primary reinforcers

Self-evaluation question

- What is the difference between positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement, the two forms of punishment and extinction? Use examples to illustrate the differences between these concepts.

Skinner also distinguishes between primary and secondary or conditioned reinforcers. A **primary reinforcer** is anything of biological value to the organism, such as food and water, whereas a **secondary reinforcer** is a stimulus that has acquired reinforcement value because of its association with primary reinforcers (Lundin, 1974).

Examples of secondary reinforcers are money (which can be exchanged for just about any primary reinforcer, for buying food, for example), as well as friendliness and approval (which are associated with primary reinforcers because people are generally friendly when they offer primary reinforcers such as food).

Schedules of reinforcement

KEY TERM

schedules of reinforcement: the programmes according to which reinforcers are offered

Another aspect of operant conditioning which has been studied in the finest detail is how the conditioning of behaviour is affected by different **schedules of reinforcement** (that is, the programmes according to which reinforcers are offered). These schedules may be divided into two broad types, namely *continuous reinforcement* and *intermittent reinforcement* (sometimes also referred to as regular reinforcement and partial reinforcement respectively).

With *continuous reinforcement*, a reinforcer follows each desired response, for example when the pigeon receives food every time it pecks the disk. Continuous reinforcement is often used in laboratory experiments, but is rarely encountered in everyday life simply because it is usually not possible to be completely consistent. If a mother could succeed in kissing her child each and every time the child washed his or her face, she would be using a continuous reinforcement schedule. With *intermittent reinforcement*, the desired behaviour is not always reinforced. This type of reinforcement schedule is a common feature of everyday life. The reinforcer may be administered according to an *interval schedule* (that is, a timetable), or according to a *ratio schedule* (that is, once the desired behaviour has been performed a certain number of times). Both of these schedules can follow a *fixed* or a *variable* pattern, and we can therefore distinguish the following types of intermittent reinforcement:

- *Fixed interval reinforcement* is used when the reinforcer is given at regular intervals, for example when the subject receives food every 60 seconds. When employees are paid at the end of every week, a fixed interval schedule of reinforcement is used.
- *Variable interval reinforcement* occurs when a reinforcer is presented at irregular intervals, regardless of the behaviour of the organism, for example after 50 seconds, then after 40 seconds, then after 70, then after 65, and so on. When a mother gives her child a treat several times per day, but at irregular intervals, she is using a variable interval schedule of reinforcement.
- *Fixed ratio reinforcement* is used when the reinforcer is given after a fixed number of correct or desired responses, for example when the pigeon receives food every third time it pecks at the disk. An employee who receives remuneration regularly every time she completes ten items, is being reinforced according to a fixed ratio schedule of reinforcement.
- *Variable ratio reinforcement* occurs when the reinforcer is presented after an irregular number of correct or desired responses (for example when a pigeon receives a reinforcer after two pecks at the disk, then after five more pecks, then after one, and so on). A gambler who wins every now and again, but at irregular intervals, say on average every fifth time he or she plays, is being reinforced for his or her gambling according to a variable ratio schedule of reinforcement. Here the desired behaviour – from the point of view of the owner of the casino, at any rate – is the gambling!

Different schedules of reinforcement have different effects on the conditioning and extinction of behaviour (Bower & Hilgard, 1981; Ferster & Skinner, 1957; Lundin, 1974). It is generally found that behaviour is learnt most rapidly when a continuous reinforcement schedule is used, but that the behaviour learnt in this manner is also easier to extinguish than behaviour learnt by one of the intermittent reinforcement schedules. The reason for this difference in extinction is probably simply that an organism soon notices when a continuous schedule is no longer being followed, but does not pick up the cessation of an intermittent schedule as quickly. It follows that the most difficult behaviour to extinguish is that which is reinforced according to a variable ratio schedule, such as gambling. Even if the reinforcer disappears completely, the organism does not easily notice this, since it can be mistaken for an especially long interval between reinforcements!

It has also been found that different schedules result in different response patterns. The typical result of a fixed interval schedule is an increase in response rate shortly before the reinforcement is due, followed by a drop in the rate of performance till shortly before the next reinforcement, while the response rate is fairly constant when other schedules are used (for example, when employees are always paid on a Friday afternoon, they usually work better on Fridays than on other days).

It appears also that a variable ratio schedule results in the fastest, and a fixed interval schedule in the slowest response rate.

Another common finding is that intermittent reinforcement schedules result in relatively slow conditioning but in exceptionally strong resistance to extinction. This offers a possible explanation for the doggedness with which people sometimes carry on repeating certain behaviours even in the absence of reward or reinforcement.

Example

Operant conditioning

If a child cries at night when the light is switched off, this behaviour may be reinforced by the parents coming into the child's bedroom, switching on the light and caressing the child. If they do this irregularly, they are following an intermittent reinforcement schedule, and under these circumstances it would be extremely difficult to extinguish the behaviour. A single reinforcement after several evenings where the crying of the child was not reinforced, would be sufficient to start the problem all over again (Williams, 1959).

As illustrated in Figure 9.2, it is sometimes difficult to decide who is being conditioned by whom!



Figure 9.2 Who is conditioning whom?
Source: Moore (2016)

Enrichment

Operant conditioning

An interesting by-product of research on schedules of reinforcement is the discovery that pigeons can develop ‘superstitions’! In an experiment during which pigeons received food every 15 seconds, Skinner (1948) noticed that six of the eight pigeons had learnt a specific behaviour of one kind or another, which they happened to perform regularly shortly before the time of feeding. One would walk around the cage in an anticlockwise direction, two would put their heads into a corner, two others would shake their heads, and so on. It seemed as if each pigeon thought that the behaviour it performed just before the presentation of food had caused the food to drop into its cage and it therefore repeated the behaviour in order to receive more food. This phenomenon has been repeatedly confirmed in subsequent research and is regarded by behaviourists as a demonstration of how humans learn superstitions (Hall & Lindzey, 1998; Lundin, 1974). An athlete who performs exceptionally well on one occasion while wearing a red sweatband, for instance, may ascribe his or her success to the colour of the sweatband and wear only red ones in future.

KEY TERM

shaping: step-by-step conditioning of complex behaviour

Shaping

Operant conditioning can also be used to teach an organism complex and unusual behaviours. A technique called **shaping** is used for this purpose. This technique essentially entails dividing the behaviour that is to be learnt into a number of small steps, so that each step is part of a successive approximation of the total behaviour. The researcher then conditions the organism to perform these successive approximations until the complete behaviour is learnt. The following example will explain the procedure.

Example

Suppose researchers want to teach a pigeon to peck a red disk situated high against one of the walls of the cage. As pigeons usually peck on the ground, the chances are slim that the pigeon would produce this behaviour on a trial-and-error basis, and the researchers therefore decide to proceed as follows:

- They plan the steps they will use in the shaping procedure to lead the pigeon gradually to peck the red disk.
- They deprive the pigeon of food for several hours before placing it in the cage.
- They wait until the pigeon moves to a position in front of the red disk. When the pigeon does so, they drop food into the cage. They repeat this, following a continuous schedule of reinforcement: the pigeon receives food as soon as it positions itself in front of the disk.
- When this behaviour has been established, they stop reinforcement until the pigeon is standing in front of the disk and (by chance) lifts its head.
- They now reinforce this behaviour until it is well established, and then stop reinforcement. The pigeon will now tend to stand in front of the disk with its head raised.
- In a similar way the researchers reinforce the following behaviours: pecking, pecking high against the wall and pecking the disk, with the ultimate result that the pigeon learns to perform the complex behaviour of pecking the red disk on the cage wall.

Provided the organism can spontaneously produce the separate steps (that is, if the operants in question are part of its natural behavioural repertoire), an organism can be taught any complex sequence of behaviours – if the researcher is prepared to make the necessary adaptations and has sufficient patience! In fact, this method has been used by animal trainers for centuries. Skinner's contribution does not lie in the discovery of a new technique, but in demonstrating that it works in laboratory conditions, and without requiring any assumptions regarding unobservable drives or inborn talents. Skinner regards the success of shaping as strong support for his contention that behaviour can be controlled by manipulating environmental variables. He argues that human behaviour is learnt in precisely the same way and does not require explanation in terms of internal factors. This point will be discussed further in section 9.9 *Implications and applications*.

Self-evaluation question

- How would you explain the various schedules of reinforcement? Pay specific attention to the advantages and disadvantages of each type of schedule.
- Which specific kind of operant reinforcement is used to train circus animals? Explain.

Activity

Apply the concept of behavioural shaping to your own life. Find an example from your own life experience to illustrate behavioural shaping.

9.6 The development of the personality

Does Skinner's behavioural theory have implications for developmental psychology?

Although Skinner did not produce a complete *developmental theory*, nor even try to describe systematically the development of the individual, it is quite clear that his theory has considerable implications for developmental psychology. His standpoint can be summarised as follows: although he does not deny the importance of genetic factors nor of maturation, his interest lies almost exclusively with the *effect of learning* on the development of the behaviour of the organism (Ferster & Skinner, 1957; Lundin, 1974).

We will illustrate some of the principles of learning in a social context by analysing some episodes in the life of a hypothetical person called John.

Example

John's mother would like him to say 'daddy' because she knows that his father would be proud. John vocalises a lot, as most babies do. When one day he says 'dah-dah', she is pleased and hugs and kisses him, and when his father comes home she excitedly tells him the news. This pattern continues for a few days: whenever John says something vaguely resembling 'daddy' the parents show their pleasure.

(continued)

They may not know it, but they are using operant conditioning to reinforce selectively one of the numerous verbal operants that John produces. If they consistently reinforce the 'dah-dah' response every time it appears, they are using a continuous reinforcement schedule, but if they do not reinforce the response every time – which is usually the case – they are using an intermittent reinforcement schedule. Since the operant 'dah-dah' is a step towards 'daddy', they are also using behaviour shaping.

After some days, however, they are no longer satisfied with 'dah-dah' and reinforce only a clear 'daddy'. In addition, his mother no longer gets excited when he says 'daddy' when only she is present. When he says it in the presence of his father, however, they both show how pleased they are. Unknowingly, they are shaping John's behaviour: they are conditioning him in such a way that his father becomes the discriminatory stimulus for the response 'daddy'. At first John says 'daddy' to any adult, but he gradually learns, through further discriminatory reinforcement and behavioural shaping, to use the word only as a name for his father.

John's behaviour is also often reinforced when he imitates his father. The reinforcers he receives for such copying behaviour are mostly secondary reinforcers such as praise, laughter and hugging. These are, however, often coupled with primary reinforcers such as sweets. The copying behaviour is reinforced according to an intermittent schedule of reinforcement, with the result that he will not easily lose these habits.

After a while, it appears that John is also copying his father's aggressive behaviour. This behaviour is sometimes reinforced by the fact that it enables him to attain the best titbits before his friends can, and sometimes because his mother shows him how proud she is of him for being like Daddy. As a result, he develops several forms of behaviour which society describes as 'aggressive', and people consequently say that he has an aggressive trait. (Note that Skinner himself would simply call this learnt behaviour, not a trait.)

Enrichment

Skinner's books *Verbal behavior* (1957) and *Walden Two* (1948a) demonstrate how serious he is when he says that the development of the individual is determined by environmental factors. In *Verbal behavior* he argues that language is the result purely of learning, and in the novel *Walden Two* he describes a community that is designed in such a way as to control all its members by conditioning and the manipulation of environmental influences.

9.7 Optimal development

How does Skinner describe optimal or ideal functioning?

Although Skinner wrote nothing on this topic, we may readily conclude that for him *optimal development* lies in learning to behave in such a way that one receives positive primary and secondary reinforcers and avoids aversive reinforcers.

Can individuals, in Skinner's view, do anything to contribute to their optimal development? This question must be answered in two ways. Skinner's explicit statement is that the individual does not have this ability, as the environment completely determines his or her development. However, we maintain that Skinner's reasoning is not completely logical on this issue, as he also appears to assume that at least some people – including himself – can take decisions to improve their own and other people's environment in ways that will encourage optimal development. This interesting point will be discussed at greater length in 9.10. *Evaluation of the theory.*

9.8 Views on psychopathology

Do Skinner's views offer explanations for psychopathological behaviour?

Skinner does not regard *psychopathology* as a mental disturbance that should be explained as the result of internal conflicts or guilt feelings, but quite simply as undesirable behaviour that, like any other behaviour, is subject to the usual learning principles. The only essential difference between healthy and maladapted or neurotic people is that the latter have learnt fewer 'effective' behaviours, or learnt behaviours that do not lead to positive reinforcements in their particular environment or that are associated with aversive reinforcers. Depression, for example, may result when an important source of positive reinforcement disappears, as when a loved one dies, while the bizarre behaviour often exhibited during psychoses may have its source in the fact that the patient learns the behaviour because his or her environment, in some way, reinforced it (Cramer, 1992).

9.9 Implications and applications

In which areas of life has Skinner's theory been applied and, more specifically, what value does Skinner's theory have for education, psychotherapy, research and the handling of aggression?

In view of the fact that Skinner's theory is based on the environmentalistic assumption and that he regards control of behaviour as the most important test of a theory, it is not surprising that his theory has been applied in many areas. Hall and Lindzey (1998) mention the following areas in which the theory has been applied by Skinner and his students: missile control (Skinner, 1968); the effects of psycho-pharmaceutical medication (Boren, 1961); educational technology (Skinner, 1968), the development of experimental societies (Skinner, 1961); the treatment of psychotics, autistic children and the mentally retarded (Krasner & Ullman, 1985); and child development (Bijou & Baer, 1966). Although Skinner's theory is simple and economical in the sense that it entails few assumptions concerning subjective events, it has implications for just about every aspect of life. Here we can discuss only some of these.

9.9.1 Education

Skinner's theory was directly responsible for the development of a teaching method known as *programmed instruction*. This teaching method requires that the material to be learnt be subdivided into a number of small steps so that learners can be reinforced as they successfully complete each consecutive step. The first learning programmes were even presented with the aid of teaching machines designed by Skinner. Today a great variety of instructional programmes are available in computerised form. These programmes function automatically and can therefore be of great use in making education widely available, particularly in third world countries that have a shortage of well-trained teachers (Meyer, 1965). Skinner's ideas are also widely used in open learning contexts (Rowntree, 1990).

Programmed instruction is also of tremendous value in remedial teaching where reinforcement principles are used to rectify specific learning deficiencies.

The principle underlying programmed instruction (namely that immediate reinforcement facilitates the acquisition of behaviour), is also put to wide use in schools in other ways, for example, when children are encouraged to improve their performance by presenting them with tokens, prizes and other forms of recognition and secondary reinforcers.

Besides these direct applications, Skinner's theory also has wider implications for education in general. Consider, for example, the implications of research into the various schedules of reinforcement for the moral education of children. Skinner's research finding that intermittent schedules of reinforcement lead to better retention seems to contradict the widely-held opinion that parents should apply the moral rules of society strictly and consistently. Skinner's findings would rather suggest that children who receive only partial and irregular reinforcement for acceptable behaviour are more likely to persist with such behaviour in the absence of their parents than children who are consistently and regularly rewarded for good behaviour. In other words, it appears as if partial reinforcement may be a more effective method for developing sound morals and a strong conscience than continuous reinforcement – an issue well worth thorough investigation.

Self-evaluation question

- How could Skinner's theory be used in schools?

9.9.2 Psychotherapy

In line with their view of psychopathology as undesirable, acquired behaviour, behaviouristically-oriented psychologists define therapy as *behaviour therapy*, or changing the client's behaviour by means of a learning method of one kind or another. There are basically two forms of behaviour therapy, namely *expansion of clients' behavioural repertoire* by teaching them desirable behaviour, and *elimination or weakening of unacceptable behaviour* with the aid of some or other learning method.

The following is an overview of some of the most well-known specific techniques within this context. Note, however, that these methods were not all used by Skinner himself. In fact, some of the methods used in behaviour therapy are not strictly associated with radical behaviourism.

Expanding the client's behavioural repertoire

Behaviouristically-oriented therapists use various methods to teach desired behaviour to clients. These include *operant conditioning*, *respondent* or *classical conditioning* and *systematic desensitisation*.

KEY TERM

token economy: rewarding clients for producing desired behaviour by giving them some token

(a) Token economy: A method for teaching desired behaviour by means of operant conditioning

This method, which was developed by Skinner, is founded directly on the principles of operant conditioning. It entails rewarding clients for producing the desired behaviour by giving them some token, for example plastic disks, which they can later exchange for reinforcers of their own choice, for example a delicacy of some kind, a film show or an outing. This method has been used with considerable success in a variety of situations (Hall & Lindzey, 1998; Schwartz, 1982:83ff.). Ayllon and Azrin (1968), for example, treated a group of chronic psychotic patients by offering token reinforcers for simple desired behaviours such as eating, washing or performing a small task without help. The tokens could be exchanged for 'desirable' things such as cigarettes, clothes, going to the cinema, or privacy. The researchers noted a sharp increase in the desired behaviours.

(b) Teaching desired behaviour by respondent or classical conditioning

When a client complains of being unable to produce certain desired behaviour (for example, ejaculation or sleep), the therapist may use classical conditioning to establish an association between relevant stimuli and the desired behaviour. Sleeplessness, for instance, can be treated by ensuring that the bed and bedroom become conditioned stimuli for sleep only, and not for thinking about financial problems or other sleep-disturbing matters. This can be achieved by teaching clients to go to bed only when they are really tired, to avoid sleep-disturbing thoughts while in the bedroom, and to leave the bedroom immediately as soon as such thoughts do crop up.

A famous example of this type of therapy is Mowrer and Mowrer's (1938) treatment of enuresis. Seen from the point of view of learning theory, enuresis is the result of the child having failed to learn to wake up in response to the stimulus of a full bladder. In order to teach enuretic children the desired response (waking up when the bladder is full), Mowrer and Mowrer designed a cushion which can be attached to the child's body and that rings a bell whenever it is wet. This wakes the child each time urination occurs during sleep. After a few nights of this treatment, the child begins to wake before urinating. Because of its repeated association with the bell (the unconditioned stimulus), bladder tension becomes a conditioned stimulus for waking up. This apparatus proved highly successful and is now freely available on the market (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998).

Elimination or weakening of behaviour

There is a wide range of techniques for erasing undesirable behaviour from an organism's behavioural repertoire, or for reducing it.

KEY TERM

systematic desensitisation: treating fear responses through gradual association with pleasant stimuli

(a) Systematic desensitisation

This method is based on the work of Watson and Rayner (1920) and Jones (1924). However, it was further developed and publicised by South African-born Joseph Wolpe, a former student of the University of the Witwatersrand (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998; Schwartz, 1982).

Wolpe's method is intended to eliminate reactions of fear by teaching the individual to relax in the presence of the feared stimulus. Wolpe (1961; 1969) reasoned that an antagonistic response (that is, one that is incompatible with fear, such as relaxation, humour or sexual stimulation), occurring in the presence of the fear-arousing stimulus, would prevent the fear response. This principle is known as *reciprocal inhibition*.

The method entails three steps, namely learning the antagonistic response (usually muscle relaxation), compiling an anxiety hierarchy, and the actual desensitisation process. In the case of a man with an exaggerated fear of snakes, the procedure might be as follows: the client first learns systematically to relax all his muscles. When he has mastered this technique, he compiles an anxiety hierarchy in consultation with the therapist. This is a list of situations in which he experiences his fear of snakes, arranged in order of severity. During the third stage, that of the actual therapy, he is asked to imagine the fear-arousing situations, starting with the least severe, while simultaneously relaxing. When he is able to relax properly in this situation, he moves on to imagining a situation that arouses more acute fear, and so on, until he manages to relax even in the most severe anxiety-provoking situations.

Various forms of systematic desensitisation have been developed (Schwartz, 1982). One interesting variety was developed by Stampfl and Levis (1967; 1968) and is known as implosive therapy. They reasoned that the same learning process occurring gradually during systematic desensitisation would take place more quickly if the client were suddenly to be confronted with situations that aroused extreme fear. They would begin therapy with a man with a snake phobia by encouraging him to imagine his most acute fear, perhaps that there was a snake on his body under his clothes. In fact, they sometimes used real instead of imaginary situations in such 'shocking' ways, a method that is known as *flooding* or *over-stimulation*.

Goldfried and Merbaum (1973) taught their clients the skill of relaxation as a general method of self-control to relieve tension in a variety of situations (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998; Spiegler & Guevremont, 1998).

The following article provides valuable insights into the use of desensitisation: Ankrom, S (2014). *Systematic Desensitization: Using Systematic Desensitization to Conquer your Fears*. Can be retrieved from: www.panicdisorder.about.com/od/treatments/a/SystemDesen.htm.

(b) Punishment and aversive counter-conditioning

Punishment is probably the most commonly used method for curtailing undesirable behaviour. It has the (apparent) advantage of usually leading to an immediate reduction in the undesirable behaviour, thereby making space or creating the opportunity for the acquisition of competing behaviour. Punishment is often the only practical method that can be used, for example, in certain instances of alcoholism or dangerous behaviour (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998).

Aversive counter-conditioning is a form of punishment that is often used in therapy, particularly in treating undesirable behaviour such as smoking, alcohol abuse and abnormal sexual behaviour (Rachman & Teasdale, 1969; Schwartz, 1982). It is based on the learning theory principle that a response followed by unpleasant stimuli will eventually disappear. Essentially it entails the arrangement of a situation in which the client consistently experiences an aversive stimulus whenever the response that he or she regards as undesirable occurs; for example, alcoholics may be given medication that causes nausea whenever they drink alcohol.

Punishment and aversive conditioning have a number of disadvantages, however. For example, the undesirable behaviour often reappears spontaneously after a short period. Lundin (1974:250–273) believes, further, that punishment often causes anxiety and feelings of guilt, and that this can be accompanied by further problems – although Skinner would probably not have agreed with this mentalistic explanation!

(c) Removing or changing stimuli

When undesirable behaviour has been coupled with specific discriminatory stimuli through (respondent) conditioning, it can sometimes be extinguished by removing the relevant stimuli. This can occur when people who are stressed at work, for example, go on holiday so that the tension-inducing stimuli of the office are removed and they are exposed to different, neutral stimuli. The disadvantage of this method, however, is that the undesirable behaviour usually reappears as soon as the person returns to their everyday environment (Lundin, 1974).

Undesirable behaviour is frequently combated by restraining people, for example, by placing them in a situation where they have no opportunity to produce the behaviour, such as in a hospital or a prison. But this is also mostly ineffectual because the undesirable behaviour usually reappears as soon as the restraints are lifted, probably because the everyday conditions of such a person's life include a wide array of stimuli and reinforcers that are difficult to identify, and that induce the recurrence of the undesired behaviour. This method does, however, seem to work well when the person is taught other behaviour that is incompatible with the undesired behaviour during the period of restraint (Lundin, 1974).

(d) Extinction

When behaviour is consistently not reinforced, it weakens and eventually disappears completely. This is a highly effective method if the undesired behaviour was initially learnt on the basis of a continuous schedule of reinforcement. However, when

the behaviour was acquired through intermittent schedules of reinforcement, it is sometimes extremely difficult to achieve extinction. Behaviour that is associated with secondary reinforcers is also difficult to extinguish, because it is sometimes impossible to eliminate all the secondary reinforcers. For example, when a child shows undesirable behaviour at school, such as rowdiness during class, numerous positive and negative reinforcers that may be difficult to identify could be involved, such as the attention received from other children and escape from aversive stimuli such as work and unpleasant memories (Lundin, 1974).

Activity

On the basis of Skinner's approach, plan a programme to enable a smoker to give up this habit.

9.9.3 Research

To a great extent, Skinner's theory is based on empirical research findings and is continually being subjected to empirical testing. Skinner has probably done more than any other personologist to underline the importance of *empirical research* in the development of a personality theory.

One interesting and somewhat surprising aspect of Skinner's approach to research is that he does not use samples and statistical tests. In the spirit of traditional science, he believes that results are acceptable only when a hypothesis is totally supported, and he is therefore not interested in determining the statistical probability of results. Consequently, Skinner preferred an experimental design in which only a single subject is employed, known as the *single subject design*.

Example

The single subject design

A study by Hall, Lund and Jackson (1968) of Robbie, a boy whose disruptive behaviour caused problems in the classroom, can serve to illustrate the procedure.

- One or more specific, clearly observable behaviours are selected and operationally defined. Hall, Lund and Jackson (1968) selected 'study behaviour' and defined this operationally as any period of five or more seconds during which Robbie placed his pen to paper.
- The baseline is determined. In this case it was determined that the time Robbie actually spent on his studies varied between 12% and 45% of the total study period. It was also observed that the teacher frequently paid attention to Robbie when he was not studying.
- Conditioning commences. The teacher was requested to reinforce Robbie's study behaviour by paying attention to him when he was studying and to ignore him as much as possible otherwise. The researcher observed Robbie and gave the teacher a signal when Robbie had shown one minute of uninterrupted studying. It appeared that Robbie spent about 70% of his time on his studies under these circumstances, in other words, when he was receiving reinforcement.

- An extinction phase (or conversion phase) was introduced, that is, a period during which reinforcement was withheld. This stage of the experiment has the same function as a control group in a conventional experiment. If the required behaviour continues on the new level, it can be deduced that some uncontrolled factor was operative and that the experimental variable (the reinforcement of Robbie's study behaviour in our example) was therefore not the (only) cause of the change. If, however, the behaviour returns to the previous level during this stage, one can deduce that the experimental variable was the cause of the change. The principle involved here is that behaviour leading to no specific result will be reduced or will disappear. Hall and his co-workers (1968) found that Robbie's study behaviour returned to practically the baseline level, and concluded that the reinforcement supplied by the teacher had caused the increase in study behaviour.
- A phase of reconditioning was introduced, that is, a repetition of the conditioning phase. If the frequency of the required behaviour rises again, this is taken as confirmation of the causal relationship. In our example, the renewed reinforcement supplied by the teacher again led to an increase in Robbie's study behaviour.
- Extinction and reconditioning are sometimes repeated several times. In any case, follow-up observations are used to ascertain whether the newly acquired behaviour is sustained. In this case it was found that Robbie's study behaviour was, in fact, increased in the long term, and that his general school performance improved (Hall *et al.*, 1968).

9.9.4 The interpretation and handling of aggression

Although Skinner has written little about *aggression*, his interpretation of it is clear. He rejects all mentalistic explanations, which for him means that aggression should not be regarded as the outcome of an innate drive or instinct, such as the Freudian aggressive drive or a territorial instinct (Skinner, 1974). Skinner simply regards aggression as operant behaviour – behaviour that the organism is capable of producing and that is part of its innate behavioural repertoire. If someone persists with aggressive behaviour, this is the result of reinforcement. According to Skinner, therefore, aggressive behaviour is controlled by the environment, like any other behaviour.

This means that aggression can be handled by changing the environment so that aggression is not reinforced. Skinner (1974:276) is explicit and optimistic in this regard:

If it were true that 'an even greater danger than nuclear war arises from within man himself in the form of smouldering fears, contagious panics, primitive needs for cruel violence, and raging suicidal destructiveness,' then we should be lost. Fortunately, the point of attack is more readily accessible. It is the environment that should be changed. A way of life which furthers the study of human behaviour in its relation to that environment should be in the best possible position to solve its major problems ... In the behavioristic view, man can now control his own destinies because he knows what must be done and how to do it.

Activity

Apply Skinner's theory to our modern society. In which contexts, do you think, Skinner's ideas have relevance? State reasons for your arguments.

9.10 Evaluation of the theory

How valuable is Skinner's theory for psychology?

After Freud, Skinner is probably the most widely known psychologist, amongst both psychologists and laymen. At the same time, it should be said that Skinner's theory is also one of the most controversial psychological theories. One such controversy has to do with the praise bestowed on his contribution as one of the most scientific of all psychological theories – yet his theory is criticised because it presents people as beings without freedom or dignity. On the one hand, his work is highly valued for its strong empirical foundation, while on the other hand, his animal research is rejected as an invalid basis for the study of human behaviour (Catania & Hamard, 1988; Chomsky, 1959; Richelle, 1993). The fame and the controversial evaluations which Skinner's work has achieved place an obligation on every psychologist to reach his or her own, well-founded opinion as to the value and acceptability of his theory.

As far as the empirical basis of his theory is concerned, one should keep in mind that Skinner experimented almost exclusively with animals. It must also be acknowledged, however, that when his hypotheses have been tested on human subjects, the results have, by and large, been positive. There is also considerable evidence that his theory can successfully be applied in the treatment of human problems.

When one uses empirical results as the yardstick for evaluation, it is difficult to fault Skinner's theory. In fact, Skinner's basic tenet, that behaviour is determined by environmental variables and can therefore be controlled by manipulating the environment, is 'true' in the sense that we can observe, from our everyday experience, that we ourselves, as well as others, are influenced by environmental factors. In other words, when Skinner's theory is evaluated within the area for which it is primarily intended, namely that of environmental influences on behaviour, it must be regarded as a good theory.

Serious criticisms of the theory arise when one applies a wider perspective and asks what it does not explain. Maddi (1989), for example, points out that Skinner's theory can be regarded as a good theory of learning but not as a good theory of personality because there are too many aspects of behaviour that it does not explain.

We could, for example, ask whether Skinner's theory offers a satisfactory explanation of his own behaviour, which he exhibited for a period of approximately 50 years, in developing a theory of human functioning, writing it down, reinvestigating it,

testing it empirically and defending it against critics. Although Skinner would assert that all these behaviours were the result of environmental influences, we contend that it is extremely unlikely that a complex, logically consistent conceptual system could result from the accidental, ‘blind’ reinforcement with which Skinner’s contemporaries might have responded to his operant (that is, randomly produced) behaviour – particularly as many of Skinner’s ideas were not only new but, indeed, unacceptable to his contemporaries.

Finally, we would suggest that Skinner’s theory contains a fundamental contradiction. This contradiction is probably most clearly demonstrated by the contrast between his denial of human freedom and his frequent pleas for the development of a society based on scientific knowledge of conditioning (Skinner, 1971; 1974:60, 263). If people, including Skinner himself, are indeed controlled exclusively by environmental influences, is it possible for Skinner to plead for a change in environmental circumstances, or does the mere fact that he is able to plead for a better world not prove, in itself, that people do indeed possess freedom of will? As we see it, Skinner’s repeated recommendation that we should solve our problems by improving our environment and our society leads to only one of the following two conclusions: Either Skinner is guilty of a logical error and gainsays the environmental determinism on which his theory is founded, or he excludes himself from the deterministic laws to which, in his view, the rest of us are subject. Our reasoning in this connection is strongly supported by Bandura (1986) who believed that it was not possible to say that people were not capable of influencing their own actions and were controlled by external forces as they would then not be able to have any intentional control over environmental events.

Self-evaluation question

- Skinner’s theory is usually described as ‘environmental determinism’. Explain what this means, and evaluate how consistently Skinner maintains this viewpoint.

9.11 Suggested reading

McLeod, SA (2015). *Skinner-Operant Conditioning*. Retrieved from: www.simplypsychology.org/operant-conditioning.html.

Nye, RD (1979). *What is BF Skinner really saying?* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Skinner, BF (1938). *The behavior of organisms*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Skinner, BF (1948a). *Walden Two*. New York: Macmillan.

Skinner, BF (1953). *Science and human behavior*. New York: Macmillan.

Skinner, BF (1971). *Beyond freedom and dignity*. New York: Bantam.



Chapter 10

The social cognitive learning approach

Cora Moore and Werner Meyer

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10.1 Outcomes

- Point out the similarities and differences between the social cognitive learning theory and the behaviouristically-oriented theories.
- Highlight the different aspects of personality functioning in terms of Rotter's, Bandura's and Mischel's views.
- Explain the difference between direct and observational learning.
- Understand the role of self-regulation in learning.
- Comment on how ideal and psychopathological behaviour would be viewed from a social cognitive perspective.
- Understand the implications and applications of social cognitive learning theory for various everyday contexts.
- Critically evaluate the social cognitive learning approach.

10.2 Background

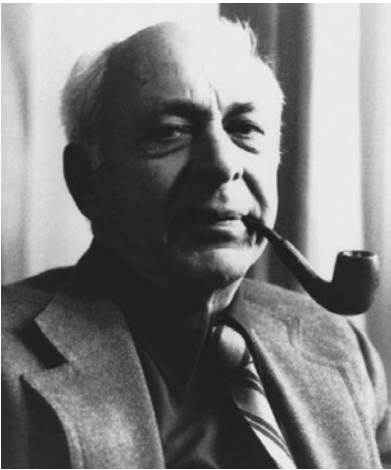
What is the essence of the social cognitive learning approach and which theorists are the main proponents of this approach?

The *social cognitive learning theory* agrees with other behaviouristically-oriented theories in regarding behaviour as primarily learnt, and in focusing on the study of observable behaviour (Hall, Lindzey, Loehlin & Manesovitz, 1985; Liebert & Spiegler, 1998; Schultz & Schultz, 2012). However, it does differ from other behaviourist theories in some respects. While a radical behaviourist such as Skinner, for example, strongly opposes mentalistic explanations, the social cognitive learning psychologists make liberal use of *unobservable matters* such as thoughts, symbolic processes, expectations and convictions in their explanation of behaviour. They make use of concepts originating in cognitive psychology, Gestalt psychology and phenomenology, rather than psychoanalytical concepts. Finally, they differ from the other behaviouristically-oriented theorists in regarding **observational learning** as the most important method of learning, and by not viewing reinforcement as an essential aspect of learning.

KEY TERM

observational learning: the behaviour of a person which changes as a result of observing other people's behaviour

Unlike most of the other personality theories, the social cognitive learning view was not developed by a single individual, but is the product of the thinking of a number of psychologists who were and are associated with various American universities. In essence, the basic points of departure of these psychologists correspond, but they do use different concepts to convey their thinking, and their emphasis of various aspects of behaviour does differ. Accordingly, the structure of this chapter is rather different from that of the other chapters in that at times we write about social cognitive learning theory in general, and at other times about the contributions of specific psychologists, notably Julian Rotter, Albert Bandura and Walter Mischel. These three are widely regarded as the most important figures in the development of social cognitive learning theory.



Julian Rotter
Source: UConn Today,
University of Connecticut

KEY TERM

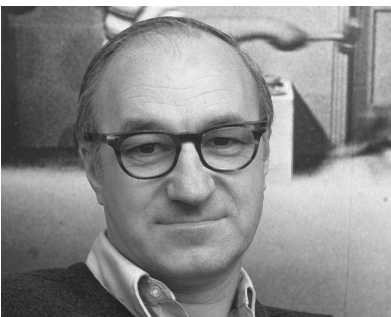
locus of control: people who believe that they can exercise considerable control over what happens to them have an *internal locus of control*, whereas those who are inclined to believe that circumstances beyond their control determine their fate have an *external locus of control*

Julian Rotter (1916–2014)

Rotter is usually regarded as the first exponent of social cognitive learning theory. The point of view expressed in his book, *Social learning and clinical psychology* (1954), is that behaviour is mainly learnt, but that people's expectations and the value they attach to the expected outcomes of their behaviour (that is, cognitive factors within the individual) are more important in the learning process than objective reinforcers within the environment. He also maintained that behaviour was acquired mainly in social situations and through the mediation of other individuals, hence his use of the term *social learning theory* (Phares, 1997; Rotter, 1954; 1982). Julian Rotter was born in 1916 in Brooklyn, New York, as the third son of Jewish immigrant parents. His father's business was adversely affected by the Great Depression and this made Rotter aware of the effects of social injustice and the situational environment on people (Mearns, 2000–2002). As a child, he frequented a New York library where he read a great deal of psychological literature, including the work of Freud and, more specifically, that of Adler. Despite this strong interest, he decided to specialise in Chemistry, for practical and financial reasons. In the end, however, his fascination for psychology triumphed, particularly after he had had the opportunity of meeting Adler in person. He continued with his study of this subject and attained his PhD at Indiana University in 1941. During his career as a practising clinical psychologist, researcher and lecturer, he frequently collaborated with George Kelly, among others (Rotter, 1982). Rotter left Ohio State in 1963 to become the director of the Clinical Psychology Training Programme at the University of Connecticut where he was professor emeritus until his death on January 6, 2014.

Apart from his theoretical contributions, Rotter is widely known for his definition of, and research on, the concept of **internal and external locus of control**, which we discuss later in this chapter. He received the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Scientific Contribution award in 1989.

A short biographical sketch and an overview of his theory by Jack Mearns can be found on the following website: <http://psych.fullerton.edu/jmearns/rotter.htm>. It also contains a photo of Rotter at age 95.



Albert Bandura
Source: The LIFE Images Collection/
Getty Images/Gallo Images

Albert Bandura (1925–)

Bandura is often regarded as the most important representative of *social cognitive learning theory* (Hall *et al.*, 1985; Liebert & Spiegler, 1998; Pervin, 1997; Phares, 1997). Unlike Rotter, who grew up in the huge city of New York, Bandura was born in Mundare, a small town in Alberta, Canada, where his father was a grain farmer. He studied first in British Columbia, and later at the University of Iowa in America where he obtained his PhD in 1952. On completion of his clinical internship, he accepted a post as a lecturer at Stanford University. It was at this institution that he produced all his academic work including Bandura and Walters, 1963; Bandura, 1973; 1977; 1986. Bandura received many honours for his

achievements, including the Guggenheim Fellowship (1972), the Distinguished Scientist Award of Division 12 of the American Psychological Association (1972), Presidency of the APA (1974) and the James McKeen Cattell award (1977). Since then he has received many other awards, such as the Thorndike Award for Distinguished Contributions of Psychology to Education in 1999 and the Lifetime Achievement award from the Association for the Advancement of Behaviour Therapy in 2001. In May and June of 2002 he received his 13th and 14th honorary degrees. Bandura's point of view, which he initially called *social learning theory* and later *social cognitive learning theory*, is that the individual's behaviour is the outcome of a process of interaction between the person, the environment and the behaviour itself (see the explanation of *reciprocal determinism* in 10.3). He places special emphasis on the learning of behaviour in which, he says, imitation of others plays an important role (see particularly the explanation of *observational learning*).

A biographical sketch of Albert Bandura by Frank Pajares can be found on the following website: <http://stanford.edu/dept/psychology/bandura/autobiography.html>.

In addition to other biographical information, Pajares mentions the good relationship Bandura has with his students and his love for hiking in the mountains, good food and wine! There is also a delightful photo of Bandura and his twin grandchildren. Bandura turned 90 on December 4, 2015 and he is still the David Starr Jordan Professor Emeritus at Stanford University.



Walter Mischel
Source: Courtesy of
Michele Myers

Walter Mischel (1930–)

Mischel's contribution lies particularly in his expansion of the interactional approach (the assumption that behaviour is the result of an interplay between person and situation); and his severe criticism of the personistic standpoint (the assumption that behaviour is determined by the personality attributes of the individual) (Mischel, 1968; 1973; 1993). His research and publications gave a considerable boost to the acknowledgement of the role of cognitive factors and placed the name *social cognitive learning approach* on the map. His own research deals mainly with the *role of expectations* (which he calls expectancies) and *self-control* in human behaviour.

Mischel was born in Vienna, but moved to America with his parents when he was nine because of the activities of the National Socialists in Austria.

He started his working career as a social worker, but later continued his studies in psychology, particularly under George Kelly and Julian Rotter. He also worked with Albert Bandura at Stanford for some years. Mischel received the Grawemeyer Award in Psychology for his studies in self-control in 2011. At age 85 he is still the Johnston Niven Professor of Humane Letters in the Department of Psychology at Columbia University. (Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Mischel) The website also contains a summary of his contributions.

10.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

How do social cognitive theorists see human nature?

We can describe the view of the person that underlies the social cognitive learning approach as a balanced one in the sense that it is not linked with any extreme or one-sided standpoint. Its assertion that behaviour is the result of knowable causes qualifies it as a positivist approach, yet it also acknowledges a multiplicity of causes, namely various factors located within the individual and the environment. Although environmental influences are regarded as highly important determinants of behaviour, this does not constitute environmental determinism since considerable allowance is made for individuals' ability to influence their own behaviour and development. Human freedom, therefore, also comes into play here. The individual and the whole situation are regarded as co-determinants of behaviour: humans are capable of self-regulation, but always in interaction with the situation.

KEY TERM

reciprocal determinism: the view that behaviour is determined by the continuous interaction between the person, the situation and the person's behaviour

Central to the social cognitive learning theorists' view of the person is the *interactional view*, also often called **reciprocal determinism** (Bandura, 1986). According to this point of view, behaviour is determined by the interaction of three factors: the person, the situation and the behaviour that takes place in this situation. In other words, behaviour is both the result and part of an ongoing process in which the individual, the situation and the individual's behaviour constantly influence one another.

In the preceding chapter, we explained that extreme behaviourists maintain quite simply that the organism produces behaviour on a trial-and-error basis and that behaviour is selected and reinforced by environmental influences. They therefore regard behaviour as being determined by forces beyond the individual's control. Cognitive learning theorists disagree strongly with this point of view. They do not regard individuals as passively reacting to environmental stimuli, but as active participants who perceive and evaluate stimuli, who strive towards goals and devise plans to achieve them, who plan their future behaviour and judge their past behaviour, and who re-plan and change their behaviour in the light of their self-evaluation.

Mischel (1968; 1973; 1986) probably did most to propagate the *interactional point of view*. He pointed out that behaviour cannot be predicted on the basis of the individual's measured characteristics as these characteristics are not fixed, but vary significantly from situation to situation. He also pointed out that behaviour cannot be predicted on the basis of situational characteristics either, as individuals react differently in the same situation. From this he concluded that behaviour is not determined exclusively by either the individual or the situation, and argued convincingly that it is the interaction between the characteristics of the individual and those of the situation that determine an individual's behaviour in a specific situation – also referred to as the *theory of specificity*.

Bandura (1977; 1978) elaborated this viewpoint and called it *reciprocal determinism*. He regards behaviour as the result of continuous interaction between personal, environmental and behavioural determinants (Bandura, 1977:194). This can be expressed as a formula, $G = f(P \times S \times B)$, which simply means that behaviour is the function of an interaction between person, situation and behaviour. Individuals therefore determine their own behaviour while being influenced by environmental factors as well as by their own behaviour (see the Enrichment below).

Enrichment

Reciprocal determinism in behaviour

What Bandura has in mind when he talks of reciprocal determinism may be explained by analysing any everyday behaviour, as in the following example:

- The behaviour: Albert wants to buy himself a suit in order to impress his girlfriend, but there is only one outfitter where he lives, who does not have what he wants. He therefore takes a bus to the nearest city, which is 100 kilometres away, to look for a suit. While he is in the city he decides to take the opportunity to visit his friend and go to the movies with him. (His behaviour in taking the bus and going to the city has changed the situation so that he now has quite a few behavioural options that were not open to him before.)
- Analysis of the behaviour: Albert has needs, cognitions and expectations: he wants a particular type of suit which he imagines will enable him to make a good impression on a particular girl, and he expects to find this suit at the local outfitter's. He does something that changes the situation: he goes to the outfitter and finds out that that suit is not in stock. His behaviour has enabled him to obtain new information, which changes his behaviour: he wonders whether he will find the suit in the city (cognitions based on previous experience now play a role) and goes there. This again changes the situation and his own cognitions so that he now has various new options that did not exist previously, and his behaviour, too, changes in several ways. He not only looks for the suit, he also visits his friend and goes to the movies. Thus, Albert's behaviour is continually determined by his own attributes (his knowledge, experience, expectations, self-confidence, etcetera), the situation (for example, the number of outfitters within reach and the suits they have in stock), and his own behaviour (if he had not travelled to the city, his behavioural options would have been different). He thus has a degree of freedom (he can make choices and change the situation), but the freedom is limited by his abilities, his experience and the choices offered by his environment.

We can also, for the moment, explain Bandura's point of view as follows: In every situation, the individual has various behaviours at his or her disposal, called the *response repertoire*. Which of these behaviours people produce in a given situation is the result of an interaction between the following factors:

- nature of the situation
- learning experiences
- expectations and goals
- behaviours people actually produce in the situation.

For the social cognitive learning theorists, then, human life is more than simply a matter of drive satisfaction. In their view, humans determine their own lives and development, within certain limits. They can choose what they regard as valuable and rewarding. Maddi (1989:642) even says that there are indications that social cognitive learning theorists assume implicitly that human beings' basic motive is to search for meaning in their lives, in which case there would be a degree of similarity with the existential theory of Viktor Frankl.

However, the social cognitive learning theory view of the person has not been fully or clearly developed. For example, it is not clear to what extent these theorists acknowledge the existence of basic biological needs, and to what extent they regard human behaviour as determined by biological characteristics. It is also not clear whether they allow for the possibility that humans' striving for meaning may be stronger than their biological needs, as Frankl maintains.

Self-evaluation questions

- Why can the social cognitive learning approach be described as 'balanced', in comparison with radical behaviourism? Explain.
- Explain the principle of reciprocal determinism on the basis of an example from your own life experience.

10.4 The structure of the personality

Do social cognitive learning theorists identify a set of 'parts' that the personality consists of?

The social cognitive learning theorists emphasise the functioning and dynamics of the personality, and do not regard the personality as consisting of a set of parts, or as having some kind of fixed structure. Accordingly, it is not possible to identify structural concepts in their thinking which could be compared with, for example, Freud's id, ego and superego. Their basic position is, simply, that behaviour is the result of an interaction between the person and the situation (and in this sense, *person* and *situation* could, perhaps, be taken as *structural concepts*).

The person is simply described as the locus where certain processes, such as observation, planning, control and judgement, take place. By means of these *person variables*, or personality functions, the person enters into interaction with the environment and, in so doing, produces behaviour. These person variables are, in turn, themselves the result of an interaction between the person (including his or her genetic make-up) and the environment (Hergenhahn, 1994).

Although the different social cognitive learning theorists identify different personality functions, and sometimes use different names for the same functions,

they follow basically the same pattern of thinking, as we shall demonstrate in the following sections. All these personality variables can be properly understood only in the context of their functioning, however, and accordingly we explain them in the next section on the dynamics of the personality.

10.5 The dynamics of the personality

How do social cognitive learning theorists explain motivation, human functioning in general and learning?

10.5.1 The social cognitive learning view of motivation

Instead of attributing *motivation* to specific motives or drives (such as Freud's sexual and aggressive drives), the social cognitive learning theorists regard motivation as they do any other aspect of human functioning – as the result of two processes, namely *interaction* and *learning*. Their basic idea here is that individuals are motivated by the interaction between individual and situation. We will take Bandura's views on the topic of motivation as representative of this theoretical approach, since other social cognitive learning theorists wrote little about it.

Bandura (1977) argues that any attempt to explain behaviour by referring to needs, drives and unconscious impulses must be rejected on both logical and empirical grounds. He points out that this kind of explanation rests on a circular argument: while a particular type of behaviour (for example, hostile behaviour) is regarded as proof that a corresponding need or drive exists (for example, a hostile drive or instinct), this need is simultaneously used to explain the fact that such behaviour occurs. This kind of reasoning, he says, can lead to the discovery of an unlimited number of drives that actually explain nothing. He also argues that behaviour is too complex to be explained with reference to a few underlying drives.

To attempt to explain behaviour as the product of environmental influences alone, as the extreme behaviourists would have it, is also inadequate in Bandura's (1977) view. He makes the point that this does not account for the observed fact that individuals frequently persist with one form of behaviour over long periods in spite of environmental changes.

He concludes that humans' complex behaviour can only be satisfactorily explained by taking into account the *interaction between the environment and cognitive processes*, such as thinking, interpretation of stimuli and expectations of future events. He maintains that behaviour is motivated by its probable results, in other words, by individuals' expectations concerning the results of their behaviour. Whether or not an individual will carry out a particular behaviour therefore depends on his or her expectations of whether it will bring valued benefits, no noticeable effects, or feared disadvantages (Bandura, 1977:18).

Bandura does not provide a list of needs or drives to explain what the individual is likely to regard as beneficial or disadvantageous, as the individual's needs, too, are determined by the interaction between person and environment. Although he does not deny the existence of biological needs, Bandura is more interested in the complex interplay of cognitive processes whereby specific behaviour is selected and in how these processes are learnt.

People's expectations concerning the results of their behaviour are shaped mainly by two types of learning: their experiences with regard to the results of their own behaviour, and their observations of the results of the behaviour of others (see 10.5.2). However, Bandura does not think that these expectations are the automatic result of environmental influences: individuals play an active role through interpreting and evaluating the results of their own and others' behaviour (Pervin, 1997).

It is important to note, in addition, that behaviour is not motivated and regulated only by *expectations* concerning its external results, but also by the individual's self-evaluation. Bandura (1977) points out that individuals have standards against which they evaluate their own behaviour so that their behaviour is not determined only by the immediate external circumstances or the expected circumstances. The individual's behaviour usually remains consistent in spite of changing circumstances. Bandura (1977:128) points out, for example, that people often retain their religious and ideological convictions in the face of strong social pressure to relinquish them. Thus the individual is also motivated to behave in a way that will lead to self-reward (for example, in the form of pride), rather than to self-punishment (for example, in the form of feelings of guilt or shame).

Example

The way a writer works is a good example of behaviour regulated by the interaction between self-evaluation and the expectation of external rewards (Bandura, 1977:129). Writers frequently reformulate their ideas several times before they are satisfied, not just to satisfy the standards of their readers, but also – and especially – to satisfy their own standards.

Mischel's ideas about self-regulation and his research into humans' ability to defer reward accord fully with Bandura's thinking. According to Mischel (1993), a person can elect to use characteristics like drive and determination to overcome obstacles, become proficient and achieve certain goals as behaviour that will lead to self-reward. On the other hand, if a person feels powerless and inept, he or she elects to behave in a manner that will lead to self-punishment.

To summarise, then, the social cognitive learning view of motivation is that to a great extent, individuals, in interaction with the situation, determine their own motivation, and that human behaviour is therefore determined by a large variety of different, individual motives.

10.5.2 Person variables: The functioning of the person according to social cognitive learning theory

Social cognitive learning theorists essentially agree in their basic thinking about *human functioning*, in that they all believe that behaviour is the result of an interaction between the individual and the situation. Nevertheless, they use different terms to explain this functioning. The following is a brief overview of the *person variables* identified by Rotter, Bandura and Mischel.

Rotter

According to Rotter, people's behaviour is determined by the joint influence of their subjective preferences regarding the possible *rewards* that may follow their behaviour, and their *expectations* that certain actions will lead to the rewards they seek. Rotter expresses this idea as a formula, which he calls the basic *prediction formula*, as follows: **BP = f(E,RV)**

This formula simply means that behaviour potential (BP) is a function of expectancy (E) and reinforcement value (RV); or, stated differently, it means that a person is more likely to behave in a specific way if he or she expects the behaviour to have a specific outcome and if that outcome is desired. The two person variables – *expectancies* and *reinforcement value* – are, of course, not fixed factors that always have the same value. Their values change relative to the situation as perceived by the individual. If both the expectancy and the reinforcement value are high, the behaviour potential is high. If either expectancy or reinforcement value is low, the behaviour potential will be lower.

Example

Someone who is in a situation where he has to choose between watching a football match on TV and studying, might consider how important or pleasant it would be to see the match, how important it is to do well in the examination, and what his chances are of attaining the rewards attached to each action. Suppose he regards his examination success as unimportant, that he in any case believes that he stands little chance of passing it (his expectation of success is low), and that the pleasure he will have from watching the match not only means more to him than examination success but that he also has no doubt at all that he will enjoy it. In such a case, the person will certainly be able to decide quite quickly to postpone his studies. But suppose he regards a good examination mark as much more important than the pleasure of watching the match, that there is a good chance of passing the examination if he works hard, and that the match may not be that interesting anyway because one team is considerably stronger than the other. Here the likelihood is that he will choose to study. Of course, between these two extremes there are many other possibilities as well.

Rotter (1966) points out that individuals eventually develop certain generalised expectancies about the results of their behaviour, and that there is a multitude of individual differences in this regard. One such generalised expectancy has to do with the extent to which other people can be trusted. The most well-known

expectancy style identified by Rotter is, however, what is known as the *locus of control*. More specifically, this is the extent to which people perceive an internal or external point of control in their lives. Some people develop the general expectation that to a large extent they themselves control their lives, while others are inclined to believe that circumstances beyond their control determine their fate. People belonging to the first category tend to perceive whatever follows their behaviour as the result of their actions or of their own relatively permanent attributes, and therefore believe that they can exercise considerable control over what happens to them. Rotter calls this characteristic an *internal locus of control*.

People of the second type, however, tend to believe that the outcome of their behaviour depends on extraneous influences such as good fortune, coincidence, fate or the influence of other people. They therefore believe that they can exercise little control over their lives. Rotter calls this characteristic an *external locus of control*.

Rotter (1966) developed a questionnaire to measure the construct internal-external locus of control. Research conducted with the aid of this questionnaire shows that the individual's view of the locus of control is related to various other aspects of the personality and of behaviour (Hall *et al.*, 1985:535; Mischel, 1973:459). Thus people with an external locus of control are usually more readily influenced than people with an internal locus of control, and an internal locus of control is usually associated with high achievement motivation (Lefcourt, 1982; Phares, 1997). However, it is important to note that locus of control is not an either/or proposition. People with a general tendency towards an external locus of control can still use an internal locus of control in specific situations (and vice versa), depending on their past learning experiences in such a situation.

Bandura

Bandura (1986) states that individuals possess various *capabilities* that underlie their functioning in the context of the interaction between person, situation and behaviour, and that distinguish them from animals. These capabilities are discussed below.

- The **symbolising capability**, which is fundamental to all the other capabilities. It enables human beings to conserve and manipulate experiences in the form of cognitions. This makes it possible to reflect on experiences, and to use them in planning future actions. This ability also enables people to communicate with one another, even across great expanses of time and place, and to influence one another. This means that individuals can formulate ideas about matters that they themselves have never directly experienced, and that humanity can accumulate a wealth of experiences in the form of culture, which may be of value to members of that culture for many generations.
- The **forethought capability** implies that people do not simply react only to the immediate situation and are also not simply programmed by their pasts. They can devise plans and goals for the future and act in accordance with these.

- The **vicarious capability**, in other words, the individual's ability to learn from the experience of others, broadens his or her learning capability immensely. Probably the most notable consequence of this capability is that it enables the individual to learn, by observation of others, complex and dangerous behaviours that could never be acquired through direct experience.
- The **self-regulatory capability** refers to people's ability to live by their own standards, and therefore to be relatively independent of other people's approval and control.
- The **self-reflective capability** is the uniquely human ability to have a self-image, to be able to reflect on oneself, and to evaluate oneself. For Bandura, the central component of this capability is people's *self-efficacy* perception; in other words, their beliefs about their capabilities to function effectively in a given situation. The basic tenets of his theory of self-efficacy and its applications to various contexts can be found in his 1997 book entitled *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Because he believed the topic to be so central, Bandura devoted considerable research to it. His findings (1977b) include the following:
 - People's self-efficacy perception (or self-efficacy, for short) determines whether or not they will make any attempt to deal with a situation.
 - The self-efficacy perception considerably influences people's choice of situations because they will tend to choose situations in which they believe they will achieve success.
 - Persons with high self-efficacy are likely to be more strongly motivated and to be more persistent in attempting to take control of a situation than persons who mistrust their own capabilities. High self-efficacy therefore produces more success experiences, which then further augment the self-efficacy. The opposite happens for persons with low self-efficacy, leading to a vicious circle, which further reduces their self-efficacy.

KEY TERM

self-efficacy: people's beliefs about their capabilities to function effectively in a given situation

Findings such as these resulted in considerable research to establish methods of increasing the individual's self-efficacy (Hall *et al.*, 1985; Liebert & Spiegel, 1998) and the frequent use of such methods in psychotherapy.

Mischel

The list of person variables described by Mischel is quite comprehensive, and is intended to incorporate all the variables identified by Rotter and Bandura. Mischel calls these *cognitive-social person variables*.

The first person variable Mischel describes is *encoding strategies*. Proceeding from the symbolising capability highlighted by Bandura, Mischel points out that there are vast differences in the way in which people encode or symbolise. A situation that one person experiences as threatening is experienced by someone else as challenging, while a third person may perceive it as boring or relaxing. For each, his perception of the situation determines how he or she will react.

People gradually develop characteristic ways of encoding: they tend, for example, to give selective attention to certain things and to ignore certain other things, or group them together. These encoding strategies have a wide-ranging influence on the people's entire personalities, particularly because to a large degree they determine what they will learn and how they will see and evaluate themselves. Encoding strategies thus correspond closely to Bandura's self-efficacy perception.



Self-efficacy beliefs influence performance
Source: viafilms. iStock Photo

A second person variable, *expectancy*, corresponds with the person variable identified by Rotter, which he also refers to as expectancy. This is, simply, the person's expectations regarding the outcomes of his or her behaviour. Mischel points out that differences between people may be ascribed largely to their expectancies. The person's self-efficacy expectancies are, of course, also important here.

Another person variable, which corresponds with Rotter's concept of reinforcement value, is the individual's *subjective values*. If two people have the same expectations of reward in a given situation, they may nevertheless behave differently because the reward has different values for each of them. Another person variable which Mischel believes to be important is the individual's *self-regulating systems and plans*. This includes various functions, such as the standards persons set for themselves, the goals they strive for, the way they react to success or failure, and patterns of thinking that they select to cope with situations. These systems and plans provide individuals with a measure of control over their own lives, but here, too, there are a great number of individual differences. People have different standards, goals, reactions and plans for overcoming problems. Finally, individuals differ, according to Mischel, in their *competencies*, or in their ability to deal with the environment.

This includes such things as knowledge, skills and the ability to generate cognitions and actions.

Self-evaluation questions

- Which personality functions are distinguished by Rotter, Bandura and Mischel?
- Explain the concept of *internal* versus *external locus of control* as a generalised expectancy or expectancy style.
- Explain what Bandura means by human beings' *symbolising capability*, and indicate how this forms the basis of several other personality variables.

Example

If Mandla usually behaves in an aggressive, domineering way, whereas Sipho is usually submissive, the likelihood is that they both expect certain valued results from their different ways of behaving, or they expect to avoid certain expected, unpleasant results.

Activity

Apply social cognitive learning principles to indicate how behaviour is motivated by self-evaluation and the expectation of external consequences. Debate with a friend whether these factors indeed interact with each other in the motivation of behaviour. Now write down examples from your life experience to illustrate your arguments.

Apply Bandura's ideas on self-efficacy beliefs to your own behaviour patterns. Write down examples to illustrate how self-efficacy beliefs have influenced your functioning and the functioning of someone you know.

10.5.3 Learning from the social cognitive learning perspective

In this section, we will concentrate almost exclusively on the work of Bandura, since he made the most important original contributions in this area.

Like other behaviouristically-oriented psychologists, social cognitive learning theorists believe that all behaviour, except for a few reflexes, is acquired through *learning* (Bandura, 1977:16). It is, however, important to note the differences between the social cognitive and the standard behaviouristically-oriented views on learning.

The most important difference has to do with the role of the individual in the learning process. While Skinner and other behaviourists believe that individuals learn in a passive way on the basis of inputs from the environment, the social cognitive learning theorists regard individuals as *active participants* who can influence their own learning process in a number of ways, for example, by choosing what they want to learn, through their values, which determine what they will regard as a reward for behaviour, and by rewarding or punishing themselves.

A second important difference concerns the form of learning. Skinner and other behaviourists regard conditioning as the only form of learning, whereas the social cognitive learning theorists acknowledge three forms of learning, namely *learning through direct experience* (which includes conditioning), *observational learning* and *learning through self-regulation*. (These forms of learning are explained more fully later.)

A third difference, which relates to the previous two and to some extent overlaps with them, concerns specifically the concept of reinforcement (and punishment), and the forms of reinforcement that are recognised. While radical and moderate behaviourists believe that learning is always linked with reinforcement by an external agent, social cognitive learning theorists distinguish between *direct*, *vicarious* and *self-reinforcement*.

- **Direct reinforcement** occurs when individuals receive rewards for their behaviour from external agents (for example, when children receive a sweet or praise from an adult for behaving in a particular way), or when something unpleasant is taken away from them (for example, when children can leave their room after completing their homework). *Direct punishment* takes place when an external agent subjects individuals to painful or unpleasant stimuli (for example, when children are beaten), or when something pleasant is withheld from the individual (for example, when parents punish children by not allowing them to watch television).
- **Vicarious reinforcement** occurs when one person observes another being rewarded for his or her behaviour (for instance, when a child sees another child getting a sweet after completing a task). *Vicarious punishment* takes place when a person observes another being punished for some behaviour (for example, a child who sees another child being punished for swearing). Vicarious reinforcement and punishment play a particularly important role in observational learning.
- **Self-reinforcement** occurs when individuals reward their own behaviour by praising themselves or feeling proud, or by giving themselves a concrete reward (for example, eating an ice-cream on completing a task). We talk of *self-punishment* when individuals punish their own behaviour by blaming themselves or feeling ashamed, or by punishing themselves in a concrete way (for example, not allowing themselves to have an ice-cream because they have not completed a task). It is important to note that self-regulation (that is, self-reinforcement and self-punishment) plays an important role in all three types of learning (that is, learning through direct experience, observational learning and self-regulation). In fact, Bandura is of the opinion that the individual's subjective acceptance of reward and punishment is probably the most important element. This further highlights the importance of the individual as an active participant in the learning process.

KEY TERM

direct learning: when people learn through direct experience, their behaviour changes as a result of performing a behaviour, for which they are rewarded or punished by someone else

Learning through direct experience

When people learn through **direct experience**, their behaviour changes as a result of performing a behaviour, for which they are *rewarded or punished by someone else*. This is the form of learning singled out for study by Skinner and other behaviouristically-

oriented psychologists, and which is known by such terms as *operant or instrumental* and *classical or respondent* conditioning. According to the social cognitive theorists, this learning through direct experience is by no means the only form of learning. They believe that there are other forms of learning that make a far greater impact on the life of the individual – namely observational learning and learning through self-regulation. In addition, they define learning through direct experience differently from Skinner. According to them, learning and conditioning should not be thought of as automatic processes, and they maintain that cognitive processes play a significant role even in this type of learning. Bandura (1977:17) specifically points out that people do not just produce behaviour, but also consciously perceive and think about the results of their behaviour. Thinking is therefore an important factor, and the individual not only reacts to stimuli, but interprets them and makes hypotheses about the results of various possible behaviours in a specific situation. All available information plays a role in this process of interpretation, including what other people say about the results of behaviour. Even if people regularly received positive reinforcement for a particular response, they would not persist with the behaviour if they believed, on the basis of reliable information from others, that it was not going to be rewarded in future (Estes, 1972; Grings, 1973).

Referring to our previous discussion of the different forms of reinforcement, we must point out, in addition, that according to the social cognitive learning theorists, operant and respondent conditioning are not linked only to direct reinforcement, but also to self-reinforcement. The implication of this is that the success of conditioning depends on whether the person subjectively accepts the reinforcement as a reward or not.

Example

When an individual is paid to hurt someone and feels bad about it, the person is not likely to repeat the behaviour, despite the payment.

In other words, *direct reinforcement succeeds only when it occurs in conjunction with self-reward*. If people subjectively punish themselves for their behaviour, direct reinforcement is unlikely to result in learning.

Observational learning

According to Bandura and other social cognitive learning theorists, *observational learning* (that is, learning by observing other people's behaviour) is the most important form of learning, and they examine it in great detail. They think that people learn only a small proportion of their behavioural repertoire through direct experience (Bandura, 1977). Many behaviours are so complex, dangerous or far removed from the individual's innate reflexes that it is unlikely – even impossible – that they could be learnt without the mediation of social influences, such as verbal instructions and practical demonstrations. Thus it is extremely unlikely that anyone would learn to drive a car, play tennis, shave, weld, knit and shoot through accidentally producing the correct responses and being rewarded for them (Hall *et al.*, 1985; Bower & Hilgard, 1981).

KEY TERMS

observer: the person who observes someone else's behaviour

model: the person whose behaviour is observed

vicarious reinforcement: when the model's behaviour is reinforced and the observer learns the behaviour

modelling: the behaviour of the model

imitation: when the behaviour of a model is repeated

counter-imitation: refers to cases where the observers do the opposite of what they have observed in the model

When discussing observational learning it is important to distinguish between the following terms:

- **Social learning** refers to all learning phenomena in which social and cognitive factors play a role. It is, therefore, a more inclusive term than observational learning.
- The most important figures involved in observational learning are the **model** (that is, the person, book or film character, animal or other figure) whose behaviour is observed; the **observer** (that is, the person who observes someone else's behaviour); and the **reinforcement agent** (that is, the person who rewards or punishes the model's behaviour).
- In **observational learning** the behaviour of one person (the observer) changes as a result of observing the behaviour of another (the model). When the model's behaviour is reinforced and the observer learns the behaviour, we talk of **vicarious reinforcement**. The behaviour of the model is called **modelling**, and that of the observer, **imitation**. The term **counter-imitation** refers to cases where the observers do the opposite of what they have observed in the model. (Counter-imitation may be the result of, for example, vicarious punishment, that is, when observers see that the model is punished, they behave differently from the model to avoid punishment. Counter-imitation may, however, arise from other causes as well, such as a negative attitude towards the model.)

Example**The experimental demonstration of observational learning**

The most important aspects of observational learning are illustrated by the well-known experiments carried out by Bandura and his associates, in which children observe and subsequently imitate the behaviour of a model (Bandura, 1965; Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961; Bandura & Walters, 1963). The procedure is typically as follows:

Children observe an adult (the model) treating a Bobo doll (a large, inflatable doll) in some unusual way. The model performs specific behaviours which the children (the observers) have probably never seen before. The children are then carefully observed in order to ascertain how much of the model's behaviour they will imitate spontaneously.

Children who observe a model being rewarded for his or her behaviour usually show more spontaneous imitation than children who see a model being punished for the same behaviour. However, when the children are encouraged to show what the model did, for instance when they are offered a reward, most of them are able to repeat the model's behaviour, thereby showing that they have, in fact, learnt the model's behaviour even though they do not spontaneously repeat it.

This experiment was repeated, with numerous variations, to study different aspects of learning through observation (observational learning or vicarious learning). The following are some of the most frequently used variations:

- Instead of using a real, living person as a model, a symbolic model may be used, such as a character in a film, or a cartoon character. It appears that, as a rule, imitation will occur with any model, although models that are perceived by the observers as being similar to themselves are generally more effective. (In real life, children and adults are influenced by an array of symbolic models, such as characters in books, animals and fantasy figures.)
- The consequences of the model's behaviour may be varied, so that the model is punished or rewarded in various ways. The effect of this on imitative behaviour may then be observed.

Although observational learning is an everyday and an apparently simple matter, it does not take place automatically and consistently when someone observes a model's behaviour. Observational learning is, in fact, a fairly complex process that is influenced by a variety of factors, which are discussed later on. To grasp these factors, it is useful to highlight three aspects of observational learning – *attention*, *retention* and *reproduction* (Bandura, 1977:22–29; Bower & Hilgard, 1981; Liebert & Spiegler, 1998).

For observational learning to take place, it is essential that the observer pays *attention* to the behaviour of the model. *Retention* of the observed behaviour (that is, the extent to which the observer will remember the behaviour) depends largely on the observer's attention, which is influenced by many different factors (such as the behaviour and attributes of the model, and the relationship between the model and the observer). Retention must, however, be understood as quite distinct from *reproduction*. When someone has observed a behaviour with attention, and retention has taken place, he or she will not necessarily spontaneously repeat or reproduce the behaviour.



Modelling behaviour: Children dressing up
Source: jabejon. iStock Photo

Example

Observers who see that a model has been punished for an action (vicarious punishment) are unlikely to repeat the behaviour spontaneously, although they may well be capable of doing so if they are encouraged to do so, or are offered a reward.

The difference between retention and reproduction is evident in our everyday behaviour. All of us witness hundreds of responses by living and symbolic models every day, but we imitate few of them spontaneously. If, however, someone were to ask us to do so, we would be able to reproduce many of them (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998). We retain the behaviour although we do not spontaneously reproduce it.

Factors influencing observational learning

Social cognitive learning theorists have carried out extensive research into a wide range of *factors that influence observational learning* (Bandura, 1977; Mischel, 1993). Throughout the following discussion of some of these factors, you should keep the principle of reciprocal determinism in mind. These factors do not function in isolation, but always in the context of interaction between the individual, the situation and the immediate behaviour.

(a) The nature of the modelled behaviour

The nature of the behaviour we observe influences all three aspects of observational learning (*attention, retention and reproduction*), depending on the observer's motivation and the situation in which modelling takes place. For example, new, unknown, active or striking behaviour usually attracts the attention of observers, and such behaviour is, accordingly, more easily acquired than familiar, less striking behaviour. This is perhaps why aggressive behaviour is more readily imitated than most other behaviours (Bower & Hilgard, 1981:463). Information given to the observer in advance can also exert a considerable influence on observers' attention processes, for instance when a tennis coach draws attention to a specific aspect of a shot he or she is about to demonstrate.

The interaction between the nature of the observed behaviour and the individual's *moral values* is a particularly interesting phenomenon, especially with regard to the difference between retention and reproduction. So, for example, socially unacceptable behaviour is probably acquired as easily as desirable behaviour, but is not as readily reproduced. Children may not spontaneously imitate a model's aggressive behaviour but they will reproduce the behaviour when offered a reward, or when they expect an attractive result (Bandura, 1986; Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992; Mischel, 1993).

(b) The characteristics of the model

The characteristics of the model, such as age, sex, status and personality characteristics, in interaction with other factors, play a role in observational learning (Hall *et al.*, 1985). A model with *high status* or characteristics *similar* to

those of the observer is usually more readily imitated than a low status model or one that is dissimilar. Symbolic models, such as characters in a book or film, are often copied as readily as live models, particularly when visually presented (Hall *et al.*, 1985).

(c) The characteristics of the observer

Characteristics of the observer, such as his or her *motivation, interests, values, self-confidence, opinions, intelligence and perceptiveness*, are also important in all three aspects of observational learning. Observers' *personality* (specifically aspects such as expectancies, values and self-perceptions) is of major importance in determining which models they will select, which behaviour will hold their attention and which behaviour they will acquire and reproduce. One aspect of personality that has been particularly well studied by social cognitive learning theorists is the individual's *expectations* about the outcome of his or her behaviour, which strongly influence the reproduction of behaviour in particular. When observers expect to be rewarded for imitating modelled behaviour, they are more likely to reproduce the behaviour than when they expect no reward or expect to be punished. This expectation, in turn, is influenced by the observed results of the model's behaviour (Hergenhahn, 1994; Liebert & Spiegler, 1998; Mischel, 1993; Pervin, 1997).

(d) The results of the model's behaviour

Vicarious outcomes (the reinforcement and/or punishment a model receives) is probably the most extensively studied aspect of observational learning. The experiment with the Bobo doll described in the Example is typical of the research done in this respect.

A general conclusion that can be drawn from the research is that vicarious reward usually leads to imitation of the modelled behaviour, whereas vicarious punishment usually leads to counter-imitation (Bandura, 1986; Mischel, 1993). However, this conclusion is not entirely accurate as the influence of vicarious outcomes actually is more complex and wider in scope than this suggests.

It should be kept in mind that vicarious outcomes do not automatically influence the observers' behaviour, but that this is mediated by their cognition. This means that the vicarious results they observe provide them with information which they interpret and use in the light of the total situation and their previous experience. To be more specific, vicarious consequences have certain distinct influences on the observer.

- Vicarious consequences provide observers with information about factors they have to take into account in planning their own behaviour, such as the results they can expect if they produce the same behaviour. If children regularly observe that boys are rewarded for 'masculine' behaviour while girls are punished for it, they can take this information into account in their future behaviour.

- Vicarious consequences influence observers' motivation in that observed reinforcement generally encourages them to produce the same behaviour, while observed punishment discourages them from doing so.
- How models react to the consequences of their behaviour may influence observers' emotional reactions and values. If children observe that someone else – the model – reacts to a particular kind of food with revulsion, they are likely not to want to eat that food.
- Vicarious consequences may influence observers' perception of the model and the reinforcing agent. For example, if Peter perceives that a teacher (the reinforcing agent) punishes his friend unfairly, the status of the teacher decreases while that of his friend increases in Peter's eyes.

It is particularly important to note that vicarious outcomes do not affect the retention and reproduction of modelled behaviour in the same way. Research usually indicates that vicarious punishment and reward have a similar effect on the acquisition of behaviour, but that vicarious reward more readily leads to reproduction of modelled behaviour than does vicarious punishment. In other words, observers remember the vicariously punished and rewarded behaviours equally well, but will more readily reproduce behaviour that led to reward than behaviour that led to punishment. An interesting and somewhat surprising finding, however, is that both vicarious punishment and reward more frequently lead to acquisition than where the modelled behaviour has no noticeable consequence for the model.

Another interesting finding is that the observer's reproduction of the modelled behaviour is not influenced only by the actual vicarious outcomes, but rather by the *relative outcome*. This means that observers judge the outcome by comparing it to their previous experience. Bandura (1977:118) points out that a specific outcome may be regarded as a reward and as a punishment, depending on the observer's previous experience. For example, children from a low income group may be inclined to imitate a model who gets a small financial reward for a particular response, while children from a high income group may not perceive such a small amount as a reward and may therefore not imitate the response.

Finally, it should be pointed out that observers who do not directly imitate the modelled behaviour may nevertheless do so indirectly by producing similar behaviour. For example, children who see their parents contributing to a street collection may indirectly imitate their behaviour by sharing their toys with other children (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998). This may also apply to counter-imitation: a child who sees someone falling from a tree and breaking an arm may, as a consequence, show fear not just of tree-climbing but of a variety of dangerous situations. (Incidentally, this behaviour would be explained differently by social cognitive learning and behaviouristically-oriented theorists. The latter would link it to generalisation, while the former would be more inclined to say that the observer was acting in terms of a rule or principle he or she had deduced.)

(e) Self-efficacy

Observational learning, particularly the reproduction of acquired behaviour, is also influenced by the individuals' *self-efficacy perception*, in other words, their confidence in their ability to reproduce the behaviour. When, for example, a girl observes a gymnast demonstrating difficult exercises, she will probably acquire the behaviour in the sense that she will be able to describe what the gymnast did. Whether she will actually reproduce the behaviour, however, will depend in part on her self-confidence (that is, whether she expects to be able to do so).

Learning through self-regulation

KEY TERM

self-regulation:
individuals' ability to
regulate their own
behaviour

Self-regulation refers to the individuals' ability to regulate their own behaviour, particularly their learning processes. It therefore includes *self-reinforcement* (reinforcing your own behaviour by rewarding yourself when you meet your own standards), and *self-punishment* (eliminating certain behaviours by punishing yourself in some way when they do occur) (Bandura, 1977:130).

According to Bandura, individuals continually regulate their behaviour, for example, by choosing situations that will expose them to particular environmental influences (for example, enrolling for a course at a university), and by evaluating their own behaviour.

Bandura distinguishes two basic types of self-regulation: *internal* and *external* self-regulation. Both can, of course, operate positively (as self-reinforcement) and negatively (as self-punishment).

- **Internal self-regulation** refers to people's subjective evaluation of their own behaviour, as when they say 'well done' to themselves or when they feel proud or ashamed of their own behaviour. For example, a boy who – by chance or through logical reasoning – produces a new response (such as a new chess strategy), will be able to repeat the response later even if he receives no external reinforcement, simply because he tells himself that it is a good response and feels proud of having discovered it. However, a woman who ignores a stop sign may punish herself by telling herself that she was stupid and careless. In this type of evaluation individuals use standards based on their previous experience, their self-efficacy, their future expectations and their values. (This form of learning is not acknowledged by the radical behaviourists.)
- **External self-regulation** involves arranging the situation and the outcome of behaviour so that individuals reward or punish themselves in a concrete way (Bandura, 1977:142). For example, a girl may treat herself to a meal in a restaurant when she manages to complete a given task (external self-reinforcement). Alternatively, a man who is trying to give up smoking may punish himself by cleaning his children's shoes whenever he breaks his resolution (external self-punishment).

Self-regulation, particularly internal self-reinforcement and internal self-punishment, is regarded by social cognitive learning theorists as the most important form of learning, as it is fundamental to all other types of learning. Even where individuals are rewarded and punished by an external agent (for example, in a university course where the lecturer can dish out praise and disapproval), the effect of the reward or punishment depends on the individuals' interpretation. If students do not accept a lecturer's positive evaluation as a reward (perhaps because their work does not meet their own standards of excellence), the lecturer's praise will probably not reinforce their behaviour.

Finally, it should be pointed out that social cognitive learning theorists apply the idea of self-regulation to other aspects of behaviour as well. Rotter (1966) distinguishes between individuals with an external locus of control (who believe that external forces control their lives) and those with an internal locus of control (who believe that, to a large extent, they themselves can control what happens to them). Mischel (1993) draws attention to the relationship between people's self-regulating systems and willpower in their striving towards goals, excellence and success. The research of Mischel and his collaborators on the ability to postpone reward also shows that there are considerable individual differences as to how much self-regulation people are capable of.

The website below, created by Brian Francis Redmond and updated by Henry Eli Slicker on 28 February 2016, provides colourful diagrams and YouTube links to explain reciprocal determinism and social cognitive learning theories.

<https://wikispaces.psu.edu/display/PSYCH484/7.+Self-Efficacy+and+Social+Cognitive+Theories>

Self-evaluation questions

- How would you distinguish between learning by direct experience, observational learning and learning through self-regulation?
- By using examples, show how self-regulation is involved in learning by direct experience, observational learning and learning through self-regulation.

10.6 The development of the personality

Do the social cognitive learning theorists distinguish specific developmental stages?

According to social cognitive learning theory, the individual develops throughout the entire lifespan and continually learns new and modified behaviours (Bandura & Walters, 1963). These theorists do not distinguish any developmental stages, nor do they provide any description of the developmental process as such. For them development is simply an ongoing process of change resulting from the interaction between genetic and environmental factors (Pervin, 1997). Social cognitive learning theorists therefore concentrate on how specific kinds of behaviour develop. Their description of the development of aggressive behaviour, which we discuss in 10.9.4, illustrates the principles according to which any particular type of behaviour develops.

10.7 Optimal development

Do social cognitive learning theorists explain optimal development or do they rather talk about effective or desirable behaviour?

Social cognitive learning theorists do not make any specific pronouncements on optimal development. In fact, Rotter (1982:235) describes social cognitive theory as ‘a theory about learned behavior – not good behavior or bad behavior or adjusted behavior or maladjusted behavior’.

Nevertheless, it is possible to deduce their implicit point of view, particularly from the emphasis they place on individuals’ ability to regulate their behaviour by using their own standards. The following tentative formulation is offered: Optimally developed people are able to recognise and take into account the factors that are relevant to *effective functioning* in a given situation, even though these may be relatively complex, and succeed in producing behaviour that meets their own standards. Such people also have a realistic self-efficacy perception; in other words, they neither overestimate nor underestimate their own abilities.

However, it is largely the environment, particularly the social and cultural environment, which determines what the individual will regard as desirable and valuable. This implies that the characteristics of the optimally developed person cannot be spelt out in any absolute sense. The standards held by members of various societies will differ, as will the behaviours they aspire to acquire and produce. A particular characteristic, such as an external locus of control, may be regarded as desirable in one culture and undesirable in another.

10.8 Views on psychopathology

How do social cognitive learning theorists explain the development of pathological or undesirable behaviour?

According to social cognitive learning theorists, *pathological behaviour* is learnt, just like any other behaviour. This agrees with the view of other behaviouristically-oriented theorists, with the important difference that social cognitive learning theorists emphasise the role of observational learning with regard to the presence and influence of models. They also agree with other behaviouristically-oriented theorists in not looking for underlying dynamic causes of psychopathological behaviour (Pervin, 1997), and in virtually ignoring organically-based disturbances.

In addition, however, social cognitive learning theorists have developed more specific ideas about the origin of undesirable behaviour. Bandura, for example, thinks that a *lack of self-efficacy* is important in the development of undesirable behaviour. Seligman and others (1975; Scheier & Carver, 1987) identify certain

cognitive styles or encoding strategies (such as *learnt helplessness* and *pessimism*) that are linked with the development of pathological behaviour patterns (Mischel, 1993). Learnt helplessness, for example, is characterised by emotional disturbance (specifically the feeling of being at the mercy of the situation), reduced motivation (a decrease in attempts to change the situation), and cognitive deficiency (a general inability to make the connection between behaviour and its results, even in situations in which control is possible). Further research by Seligman and various co-workers revealed that learnt helplessness is associated with several other personality characteristics (Peterson & Seligman, 1984). This led to the idea that individuals develop characteristic styles in their attempts to explain events in their environment. This *explanatory style* has three bipolar components: a preference for either an *external* or an *internal locus of control* (that is, a tendency to feel either that you control your own behaviour, or that external circumstances control your behaviour), a tendency to see situations as either *stable* or *transient*, and a tendency to view matters either *globally* or in a *limited* way. Individuals in whose style the internal, stable and global components predominate tend toward depression, according to Peterson and Seligman (1984).

Example

The following statements reflect thought patterns typical of such individuals: 'My car was stolen because I did not watch where I parked it.' (internal style); 'It happened because I am careless and will always be so.' (stable style); 'This event will affect my whole life; I could lose my job because I will be late for work; without work I will not be able to pay my rent; etc.' (global style) (Hall *et al.*, 1985:556).

By contrast, someone with an extreme external style would be inclined to place the blame for everything that goes wrong on other people or on circumstances. This could give rise to paranoia, among other things.

The emphasis placed on cognitive elements in the causation of psychological disturbances means that social cognitive learning therapy frequently focuses on changing an individual's unhealthy expectancy patterns and encoding strategies, and increasing their self-efficacy.

10.9 Implications and applications

How useful is social cognitive learning theory when it comes to applying it in practical settings?

Social cognitive learning theory is particularly well-equipped for *practical application* in a variety of fields. The theory and research associated with this approach draw attention to people's changeability, and also underline the numerous, complex factors that must be considered when dealing with them. At the same time, social cognitive learning theory highlights the limitations of our attempts at influencing behaviour.

Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism incorporates all these factors and limitations. In terms of this concept, the individual's behaviour can, to a large extent, be controlled by manipulating the environment, while the individual retains a degree of control. This means, more concretely, that one person (for example, a teacher or a psychologist) can influence the behaviour of others by regulating the environment in a particular way (for example, by exposing them to specific models), but at the same time the individuals concerned can also exert an influence (for example, by paying attention selectively, as well as by selectively reinforcing or punishing their own behaviour through feeling proud or ashamed according to their particular values and preferences).

How can teachers and psychotherapists use social cognitive learning theory?

KEY TERM

reinforcement agent:
the person who rewards
or punishes the model's
behaviour

10.9.1 Teaching and education

It is clear from what has been said previously that social cognitive learning theory has many important implications for teaching and education. Teachers obviously play an important role as **reinforcement agents**, but also as role models. In terms of observational learning, teachers and other figures of authority may have a profound impact on children purely by virtue of the fact that children observe their behaviour. The distinction between retention and reproduction of behaviour is of particular importance here. Anyone involved in education in any form, from classroom teaching to planning television programmes for children, should be thoroughly conversant with the research done by social cognitive theorists that shows how easily children as well as adults learn modelled behaviour, even though they may not reproduce the behaviour immediately (for example, Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961; Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1963).

10.9.2 Psychotherapy

Social cognitive learning theory has found many applications in the field of *psychotherapy*. The basic purpose of social cognitive learning therapy is to improve clients' functioning in the type of situation that they find problematic. Therapists might thus attempt to teach clients more effective cognitive styles and to improve their self-efficacy. The therapeutic techniques associated with this approach are usually relatively brief and therefore economical. Other advantages are that they can be used with individuals as well as groups, that they can be linked with various other techniques, and that lay persons can be taught to use them so that they can cope without the help of a therapist (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998).

An obvious form of therapy for social cognitive learning theorists is, of course, *modelling*, in which a model demonstrates the desired behaviour to the client. This simple technique can be applied in a variety of ways. For example, the model can play the role of someone who is learning the behaviour concerned instead of immediately appearing as an expert. In fact, this kind of modelling seems to be

more effective than normal modelling (Liebert & Spiegler, 1998), probably because the observer finds it easier to identify with someone who is, like him or her, a learner and also because it provides him or her with information on the various steps in the learning process. Another effective method is to use modelling in conjunction with systematic desensitisation (which was discussed in Chapter 9), for example, by letting the client observe a model gradually lose his or her initial fear of snakes through systematic desensitisation (Hall *et al.*, 1985; Liebert & Spiegler, 1998).

The effectiveness of modelling can be further enhanced by combining it with direct reinforcement of the client's behaviour, for example, by using the method of *participant modelling* (Bower & Hilgard, 1981:466; Hall *et al.*, 1985:547). In this case the client observes a model performing the desired behaviour, is encouraged to reproduce the behaviour and is then rewarded when he or she does.

When modelling is used in psychotherapy, the model is not necessarily a living person. Film or video recordings of a model or of the client may be used. Clients can also be encouraged to use *covert modelling* in which they simply imagine another person performing the desired behaviour. These examples show how versatile modelling is as a therapeutic technique.

Social cognitive learning theorists also developed a variety of techniques that clients can use after having been trained briefly by a psychologist. One of these is *stress inoculation* (Meichenbaum, 1977), in which clients are taught various ways of dealing with stress. They can practise these on their own and use them in any stressful situation. Clients will, for example, learn to restructure situations cognitively so that they experience them as less stressful. They also learn correct breathing and muscle relaxation techniques.

The website below provides a link to a YouTube video, *Dr. Donald Meichenbaum - On Stress Inoculation*, uploaded by PsychAlive (2011).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xiF_J1w0J8

Mahoney and Thoresen (1974) went even further and developed a method whereby individuals can become their own therapists. In accordance with the principle of self-regulation, they plan their environment so that they reward and punish their own behaviour according to a 'contract' that they draw up themselves. For example, a man who wants to stop smoking may draw up a contract with a friend in which he undertakes to stop smoking, and in which he lays down certain rewards he will receive, from himself or from his friend, after not smoking for a given length of time, as well as the punishments he must undergo if he breaks the agreement.

Another example of social cognitive learning therapy is the cognitive therapy developed by Beck (Beck, Rush, Shaw & Emery, 1979; Mischel, 1993) for treating depression. It rests on the notion that depression is caused by negative thinking and assumptions, such as a woman's belief that she has caused her husband's unacceptable behaviour, or the belief that life is always unfair. Therapy consists of teaching clients to see the relationship between their negative cognitions and their melancholy feelings, and to replace the negative ideas with more realistic thinking.

Self-evaluation question

- How can teachers and psychotherapists make fruitful use of social cognitive learning theory? Explain.

10.9.3 Measurement and research

Does social cognitive learning theory provide the psychologist with useful tools for measurement and research?

The social cognitive learning theorists' view that behaviour is the result of an interaction between personal and situational factors has far-reaching implications for the measurement of personality characteristics and for research into any aspect of human behaviour.

As regards measurement, the interactional position highlights the problems inherent in the traditional approach to psychological measurement. In the context of the traditional psychometric point of view, one could expect that someone who gets a relatively high score on a reliable and valid test of a specific attribute (for example, introversion), will consistently show more of that quality than someone with a lower score. The interactional standpoint, however, has a completely different implication. The behaviour of testees in the test situation is viewed as the result of an interaction between their characteristics and the test situation, as they experience it. If they show more of a specific characteristic than others do in one situation, this does not mean that they will do the same in a different situation. A test score can therefore not be used uncritically to predict behaviour in any situation.

Considerations along these lines have led to some interesting developments. One was that some psychologists completely rejected psychological tests, and used *biographical data* as a basis for predicting behaviour instead. Another was the development of a type of test called the *situational test* (Anastasi, 1968:520ff). Such tests are attempts to predict future behaviour on the basis of the subject's behaviour in real or simulated situations. Furthermore, social cognitive learning theorists seldom use conventional tests in their research, and prefer using trained observers who record the behaviour of subjects in selected situations (Hall *et al.*, 1985:549; Mischel, 1993).

The interactional approach also led to the development of tests, known as *S-R inventories*, in which an attempt is made to measure the person–situation interaction rather than personality characteristics as such. For example, Endler and his co-workers (Endler & Hunt, 1966; Endler & Hunt, 1969; Endler, Hunt & Rosenstein, 1962; Endler & Okada, 1975) constructed a questionnaire for the measurement of anxiety which addresses a wide spectrum of potentially anxiety-provoking situations. The testees are asked to indicate the intensity and kind of

anxiety they would experience in situations ranging from relatively anxiety-free situations (such as ‘You are on the point of going on a holiday trip’) to highly anxiety-arousing situations (such as ‘You are standing on a narrow ledge high up a mountain’).

Enrichment

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) was developed by Matthias Jerusalem and Ralph Schwarzer in 1981. It is available in 31 languages and can be downloaded from <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/health/selfscal.htm>.

The following is an example of self-efficacy research:

Lunenburg, F (2011). Self-efficacy in the workplace: Implications for motivation and performance. *International Journal of Management, Business and Administration*, 14(1):1-6.

With reference to research in general, the interactional standpoint focuses the attention on the wide range of factors, within and outside of the individual, that can influence behaviour, and on the virtually infinite ways in which these factors can influence one another. This increases the possibilities for research, as new research topics are easily found (Mischel, 1993), but it also makes psychological researchers aware of the complexity of their field of study. The knowledge that there is a wide spectrum of internal and external factors and interactions that influence behaviour undoubtedly prompts researchers to include this wealth of factors in their research, but it also causes them to display circumspection and care in formulating their conclusions because, so often, different explanations can be proffered for the same results.

Enrichment

Jonah Lehrer’s (2009) article in the New Yorker: *Don’t! The secret of self-control*, provides an excellent overview of the research Mischel and his colleagues are currently involved in, particularly in the field of self-control and the link with academic success and life in general.

The article refers to Mischel’s original experiment in which children were offered marshmallows and were given the option to either eat the marshmallows immediately or use self-control, not eat them and receive more marshmallows. There are delightful pictures of the marshmallow children by Barry Blitt in which he depicts their various reactions. Mischel and his co-researchers and students have been following the marshmallow subjects for over 30 years and, for example, testing them for will-power and determining how their original behaviour manifested in later life.

Mischel and his team are also hoping to identify the particular brain regions that allow some people to delay gratification and control their temper. If crucial neural circuits can be identified, people could be helped to improve via their ability to control and direct attention. This could help with mental illnesses such as obsessive compulsive behaviour. (Retrieved from: www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/05/18/dont-2)

Self-evaluation question

- What are the implications of the interactional viewpoint for psychological measurement and research? Discuss.

10.9.4 The interpretation and handling of aggression

How does social cognitive learning theory explain the development of aggression and what does it suggest in terms of ways to curb aggression?

The social cognitive learning view of aggression is, essentially, that it is behaviour that develops from inborn and acquired (learnt) behaviour patterns in a lifelong process in which direct experience, observational learning and self-regulation all play a part. The most important aspects of this developmental process may be described as follows (Meyer, 1982; Mischel, 1993):

- Potentially aggressive modes of behaviour are part of the *behavioural repertoire* of each individual. Another way of saying this is that, because of genetic and environmental factors, each person has certain ways of behaving at his or her disposal that can be harnessed for aggressive purposes. (Thus humans have fists, which they can use for hitting other people, and they also have the cognitive capacity to design weapons and invent methods for injuring and killing people (Nell, 1995).
- The chances that specific aggressive responses will be repeated increase when they lead to *rewarding consequences*, for example, as a result of direct reinforcement. (A child who often succeeds in achieving the results he or she desires through aggressive behaviour will be more inclined to produce aggressive behaviour than a child who does not have a record of such successes.) It is also important to note that most children have had their 'onset' of physical aggression by the end of their second year, and most have learnt to inhibit physical aggression by school entry. It therefore seems important to start attempts at curbing aggression at an early age (Tremblay, Japel, Perusse, McDuff, Boivin, Zoccolillo & Montplaisir, 1999).
- The aggressive responses can be learnt, particularly through observing *aggressive models*. (A child can acquire new aggressive responses by observing violent models on television (Botha & Van Vuuren, 1993).) Initial empirical support is also developing for the idea that low-level aggression, such as cursing, bullying, vandalism, threats and insults, can grow into high-level aggression such as murder, rape and assaults. It is therefore imperative to also attend to curbing low-level aggression (Goldstein, 2001).
- The likelihood that acquired aggressive responses will be *performed* (reproduced) depends on a number of factors and interactions. These factors include expectancies regarding the results of behaviour, self-efficacy perceptions, the individual's interpretation of situations, self-regulating strategies and values.
- Aggressive responses can be *provoked* by unpleasant stimuli such as physical pain, frustration and belittlement, as well as by the expectation of rewarding outcomes.

- *Persistence* in aggressive behaviour, like any other behaviour, is regulated by its results. Rewarding outcomes strengthen the probability that the behaviour will be repeated, and here it should be remembered that extraneous, vicarious and self-reinforcement can all fulfil this function.
- The *regulation* of aggressive behaviour is therefore a complex function of the interaction between person, situation and behaviour (according to the principle of reciprocal determinism).
- Individuals' *contributions* to this interaction depend on their total development up to that point. This development determines which aggressive responses they already have in their behavioural repertoire, what their generalised expectancy patterns are, and what standards and values they use in evaluating the expected outcomes of their own behaviour.

This interpretation, and the research based upon it, has several implications for the handling of aggression, the most interesting of which is probably the contribution it has made to the debate on the influence of media violence. The finding that when aggressive behaviour is observed it is remembered and can be reproduced on request, underlines how vital it is that the media should be planned and controlled responsibly. However, we should bear in mind that, according to the social cognitive learning view, behaviour is always the result of interaction between person and situation. One implication of this is that aggression, like any other kind of behaviour, is not under the exclusive control of the environment, and that there are considerable individual differences in how people react to exhibitions of violence. In addition, since aggressive behaviour is influenced by such a wide range of factors, it is difficult to control it fully or to eliminate it from society by means of simple measures such as abolishing media violence.

Bandura and his co-researchers (Bandura, Caprara, Barbanelli, Patorelli & Regalia, 2001) investigated socio-cognitive, self-regulatory mechanisms governing transgressive (anti-social) behaviour. It was found that perceived academic and self-regulatory efficacy deterred transgressiveness both directly and by fostering pro-socialness and the ability to apply moral self-sanctions for harmful conduct. The challenge therefore seems to be to encourage criminals to believe that they are in fact contributing to harmful outcomes and to create educational and other contexts in which perceived academic self-efficacy and self-regulatory efficacy can be improved. Research conducted at the University of South Africa (Moore, 1997; Moore, 2000), however, points towards the importance of developing realistic academic self-efficacy beliefs which are in line with accepted academic criteria and guarding against the development of unrealistically high self-efficacy beliefs.

Social cognitive learning theory does not, then, offer an easy solution to aggression as a social problem, but places the responsibility where it belongs – with each individual member of society (since each person contributes to the regulation of his or her own behaviour), and especially with leaders and others who can exercise influence in social contexts.

Enrichment

The reference below is an example of South African research within the framework of Social Cognitive Learning.

Young, K (2014). *Exploring bullying, cyber-bullying and the authoritarian parenting style among grade six and seven learners in Benoni*. Unpublished MA dissertation. University of South Africa.

Activity

Think of examples of aggression in your community.

Apply social cognitive learning principles to these examples to come up with ways to curb the aggression. Now write a letter to the press in which your suggestions are voiced.

Self-evaluation questions

- A group of boys attending a holiday camp is shown a film in which a detective, who is attacked by a murder suspect, kills his attacker after a violent fight. Careful observation of the boys shows that their aggressive behaviour neither increased nor decreased. Does this mean that the film had no influence on the boys?
- How do social cognitive learning theorists explain the causes and maintenance of aggressive behaviour? What is the implication of this viewpoint for the question of violence in public media?

10.10 Evaluation of the theory

Does the social cognitive learning approach have a great following in psychological circles?

Social cognitive learning theory probably has more supporters among modern academic psychologists than any other theory of personality (Pervin, 1997). Its success in integrating the great traditions in academic psychology – behaviourism, Gestalt psychology and cognitive psychology – may well be the reason for its popularity.

Social cognitive learning theory must be regarded as an important theory that will probably continue to gain support. The volume of research produced by social cognitive learning theorists and the generally positive results of this research are impressive and promising. From the nature of the basic assumptions and conceptual structure that have been developed so far, it would seem that this theory could be expanded into a conceptual system that might make most competing personality theories redundant.

On the negative side, it is difficult to have an overview of the approach as a whole, probably because social cognitive learning theorists make a practice of using new terms for matters that are already well-known. This has yielded an abundance of terms for cognitive factors within the individual, which often makes it difficult to spot the simple, logical structure that underlies this approach.

10.11 Suggested reading

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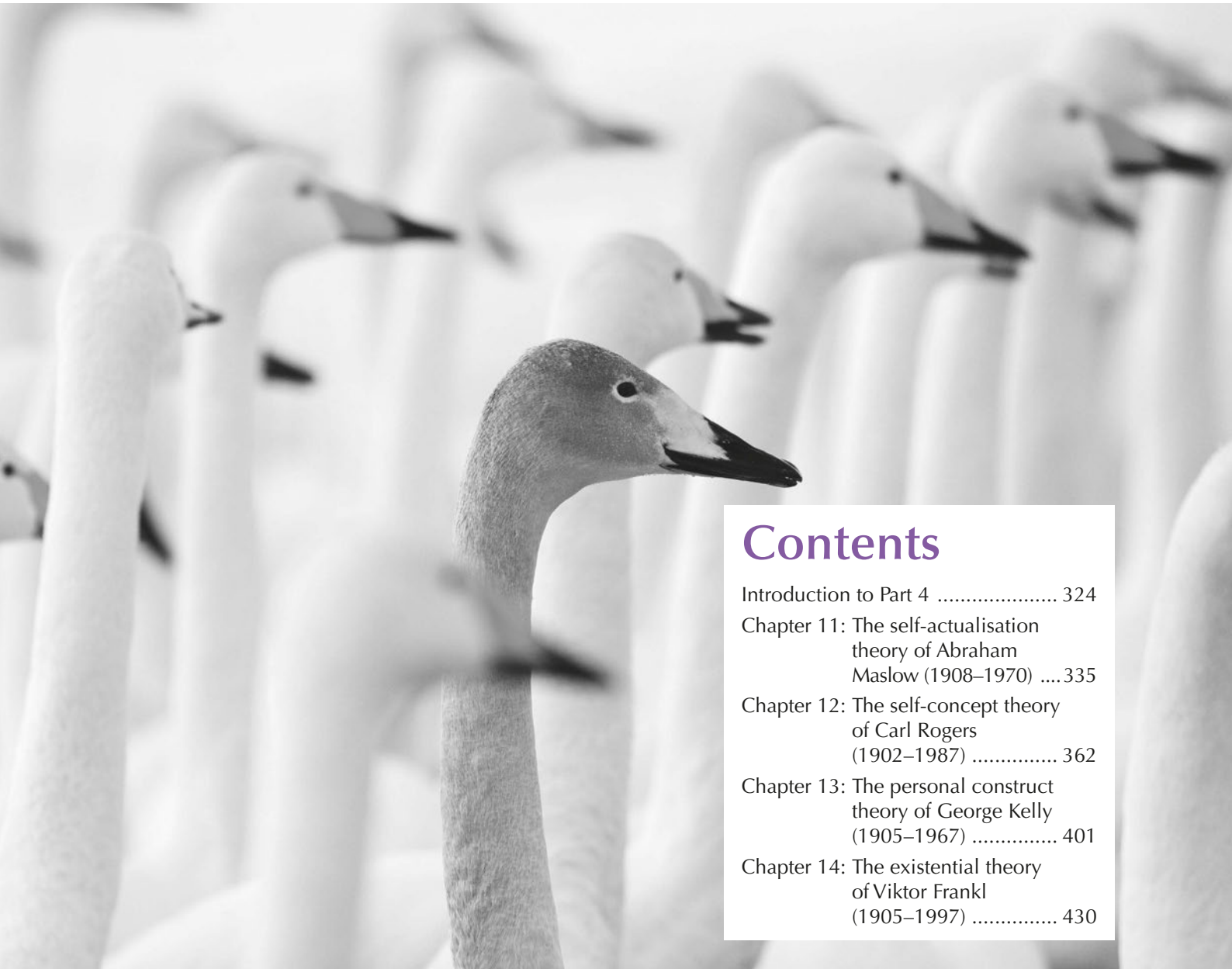
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PART 4

Person-oriented approaches

Cora Moore



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Introduction to Part 4

1 Background

The **person-oriented approach** is not one single view, but a movement that accommodates a variety of views. The theorists within this school of thought share specific complementary assumptions, which contrast with the assumptions made by psychoanalysts and behaviourists. They are, in general, uncomfortable with the psychoanalytical view of the human being as a creature who is at the mercy of internal and external forces. From within, the unconscious drives exert pressure on the individual – a pressure that has the potential to threaten his or her very existence. From outside, there are societal demands that place further limits on the individual's functioning. There is little room for freedom in such a framework, and the best a person can do is to use various defence mechanisms to find compromises between the demands of the psyche and those of society. The psychoanalytical view is also *reductionist*, in that all behaviour is explained in terms of a few underlying, unconscious drives. Complex behaviour is therefore reduced to one or two underlying factors. In addition, psychoanalytical thinkers are criticised for focusing exclusively on malfunctioning without giving attention to normal, or even ideal, functioning. The person-oriented theorists have little sympathy with such a pessimistic, limiting view of the human being. On the other hand, the behaviourists present a mechanistic human being whose functioning is on the same level as that of animals. The same principles on which animal behaviour is based are used to explain human behaviour. Extreme behaviourists, in particular, have no interest in what goes on inside a human being, and concern themselves only with how external factors determine human behaviour. The behaviourist view is also *elementalist* in that certain elements or independent units of behaviour are studied separately. As a result, it loses sight of the person as a whole.

This image of the person as a passive, unintegrated being that is controlled by the environment like a puppet, and whose functioning is on a par with that of animals, was just as unsatisfying to the person-oriented theorists. It prompted them to put forward a new perspective that would give dignity back to the human being, and portray the functioning human as a *creature of worth*. The person they present is not just an animal, and has certain uniquely human properties that make it possible to function on a *higher level* than animals. They give attention to *conscious processes*, and are particularly interested in the human as a *thinking being*. They also see humans as proactive beings who are involved in their own functioning, and are not simply manipulated by unconscious internal forces or external environmental factors. Most of these theorists also emphasise the study of the whole human being. In other words, they underline the *integrated nature* of the person, in contrast with reductionist and elementalist views. While different person-oriented theorists present different explanations and shifts in emphasis to close up the gaps they see in the psychoanalytical and behaviourist approaches, they do, as we pointed out earlier in this paragraph, share certain common basic principles. We shall now discuss these principles in more detail (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981; 1992); Hall *et al*, 1985; Phares, 1997).

1.1 The individual as a dignified human being

According to this principle, humans are unique beings with qualities that distinguish them from lifeless objects like stones and trees, and also from animals. Acknowledgement of a *higher psychological dimension* is vital in order to study these qualities, such as the human will, creativity, values, humour, autonomy, growth, actualisation and emotions (including shame, courage, love and jealousy).

The human being is much more than an animal and therefore deductions about human behaviour cannot be made from animal studies. Hjelle and Ziegler (1981) point out that only humans can theorise about humans and that this phenomenon does not exist in the animal world.

1.2 The conscious processes of the individual

In contrast to the emphasis Freud gives to the role of unconscious processes, the person-oriented theorists recognise the role of **conscious processes**, especially conscious *decision-making* processes. They do not deny that unconscious processes play a part; in fact, they do acknowledge them, especially in unhealthy functioning. Person-oriented theorists prefer, however, to concentrate on the individual's conscious experiencing and his or her evaluation of it.

1.3 The person as an active being

For the person-oriented theorists, the person does not simply react to external environmental stimuli, or merely submit to inherent drives over which he or she has no control. On the contrary, they acknowledge individuals' **active participation** in determining their own behaviour, their inherent inclination towards actualising their potential and their creative ability. Person-oriented theorists are not concerned with identifying internal or external causative factors whereby human behaviour may be manipulated and changed. They are more interested in the person's own contributions to growth and realising his or her potential.

Active participation means *freedom of choice*, which in turn means that the person is responsible for the course his or her life takes. Some theorists who adhere to the person-oriented approach strongly emphasise the role of the person as a 'free agent' who determines his or her own behaviour, while at the same time acknowledging the importance of genetic and environmental factors. Maslow, for instance, highlights the importance of environmental factors for the satisfaction of basic needs, while Rogers refers to the importance of genetic potential. According to both theories, however, active decision-making processes are of vital significance in optimal human functioning.

1.4 Emphasis on psychological health

The person-oriented theorists asserted that the *psychologically healthy person* should be the criterion in examining human functioning, and not the neurotic or psychotic person. The question they pose is: How can we ever know what people are capable of and what their potential for growth is if, like Freud, we occupy ourselves only with those whose functioning is disturbed?

1.5 The individual as an integrated whole

One of the basic tenets of the person-oriented approach is that each individual should be studied as an **integrated, unique, organised whole** or *Gestalt*. This view has its origins in the holistic ideas of Aristotle, Spinoza and William James. The person-oriented theorists revived these ideas essentially in reaction to the following three approaches:

- *dualism*, which studied body and spirit as separate entities
- *behaviourism*, which divided the individual into fragments of behaviour in the form of stimuli and responses
- *reductionism*, which attempted to explain behaviour by means of a few simple underlying elements, as in psychoanalysis where all forms of behaviour were ascribed to the functioning of the id drives.

This part deals with the theories of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, George Kelly and Viktor Frankl. In studying these it should become clear that, although there is a fundamental agreement about what the human person is, the contexts in which they emerged are actually very different.

Maslow was the leader of the group of American psychologists who, from 1955, established *humanistic psychology* as a ‘third force’ in psychology in reaction to psychoanalysis and behaviourism. **Rogers’** theory is also representative of humanistic psychology.

The basic model in humanistic psychology is the responsible person who chooses freely between the available possibilities. This is also a person in the making – someone who is always in a process of growth in which he or she strives to realise his or her potential and to be truly him- or herself. This model corresponds closely with the person-oriented approach, and therefore we have classified the humanistic theories of Maslow and Rogers as person-oriented theories. They both present humans as beings with worth and dignity who, as whole, integrated persons, actively and consciously strive towards the actualisation of their potential. While they do deal with pathology in the therapeutic context, the role of the therapist, for them, is no more than that of a facilitator in the individual’s development. Note, however, that for Rogers in particular, this is a process of realising a potential that resides in the self and not an impulse towards something higher than the self. This explains why the term ‘humanistic psychology’ has come to hold negative connotations, especially in religious circles. It is seen as preoccupied with the self and giving insufficient recognition to the urge to something or ‘Someone’ greater than the self. Some humanistic psychologists also lay emphasis on the inherently positive nature of human beings, which conflicts with

religious perspectives that take the dark side of human nature into account. Because of this negative connotation, we use the term ‘humanistic psychology’ in this book to refer only to theorists who are part of the ‘third force psychology’ that evolved in America. We use ‘person-oriented approach’ as a comprehensive term that includes both humanistic psychologists and theorists who make provision for existentialist thinking that recognises a spiritual dimension that includes more than the self.

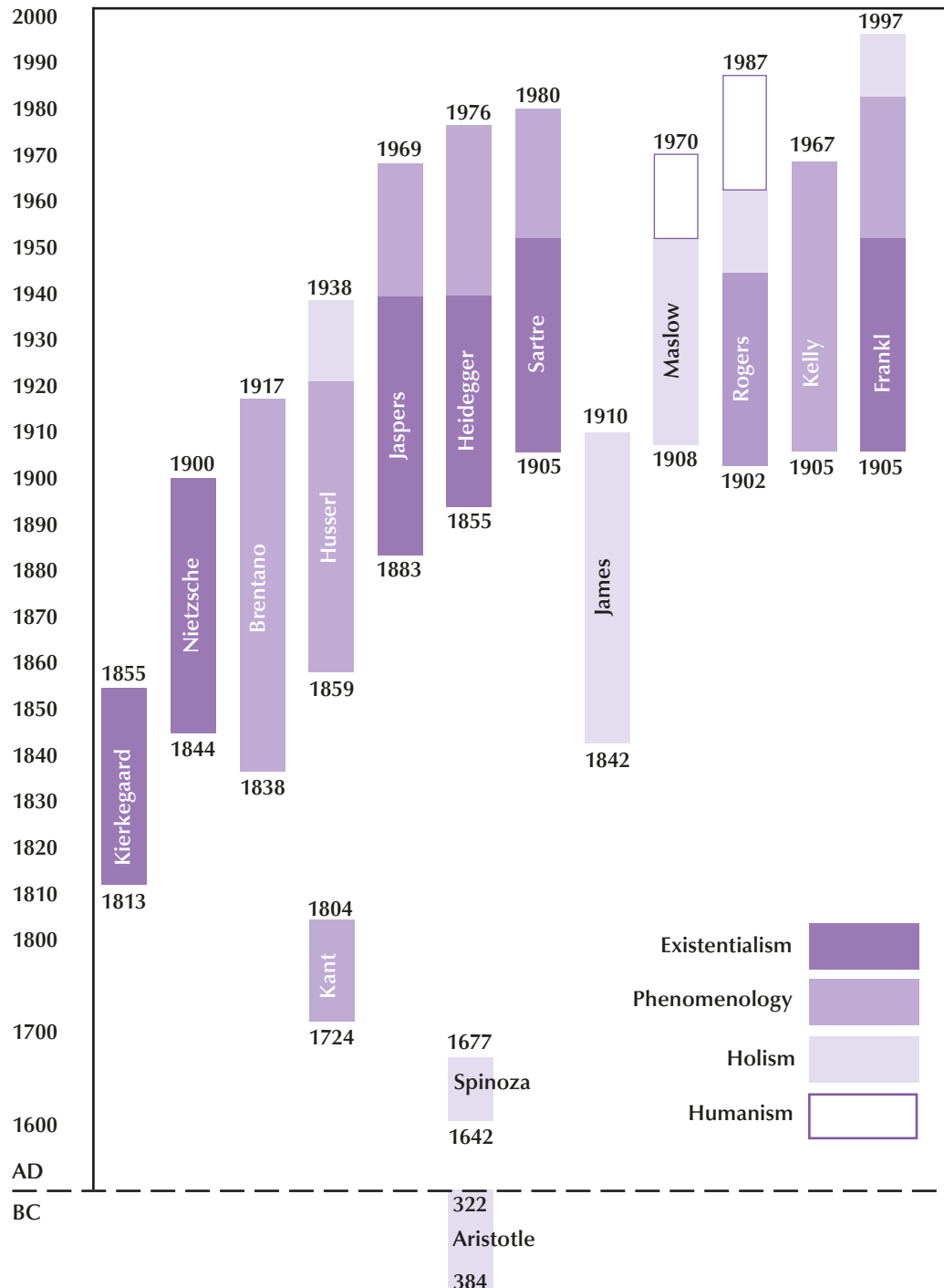


Figure 4.1 A historical overview of philosophical influences

Kelly's theory focuses exclusively on *cognitive functioning*. Strictly speaking, therefore, it is not a personality theory. It is not a holistic view in which the individual is studied as a complete entity. However, because of Kelly's emphasis on the individual's subjective construing of the world, it is possible to typify it as person-oriented. His theory is also one of the important bases for the ecosystemic approach, which we discuss later in this book.

Frankl's theory is taken as being particularly representative of the *existentialist approach* because he underlines the higher spiritual dimensions. It is not just the search for meaning in what lies outside the self that is important to Frankl, but also the human ability to transcend and find meaning and purpose in even the most desperate of circumstances. Like other person-oriented theorists, Frankl sees humans as worthy, dignified beings and assigns an important role to them as free, active agents who are able to take conscious decisions about their behaviour, and also about the attitude they adopt towards their circumstances. While Frankl does give consideration to malfunctioning in his logotherapy, the person is challenged or called upon to undertake a responsible search for meaning and purpose. He sees the person as a being who functions on three levels of existence – a physical, a psychological and a spiritual level. His approach is thus a holistic one.

Many of the principles on which the person-oriented approach rests are rooted in the history of Western philosophical thinking. To draw your attention to this important point, we provide a brief historical background to show you how certain philosophical schools of thought have influenced psychological theorists. We deal with existentialism, phenomenology and holism, and then discuss the 'third force' or humanistic psychology.

2 Historical background

Existentialism and *phenomenology* originated in Europe and gained acceptance during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. De Vos (cited in Möller, 1993) points out that by the 1930s, these two schools of thought started to converge and the phenomenological-existential approach came to the fore. In the following section we show how these approaches, together with the holistic school of thought, influenced the person-oriented theories. Figure 4.1 places this development in historical perspective and shows how the personality theories gave expression to different philosophies. This illustration should give you a useful frame of reference for studying this part of the book.

2.1 Existentialism

The term **existentialism** comes from the Latin word *existere* which means 'to stand outside oneself' or 'to appear' or 'to step out'. For the existentialist, the human is a being who is becoming, one who is emerging, and not merely a conglomeration of static contents, mechanisms or patterns. Existentialism also implies that human beings can be more than they are, that they have the ability to stand outside of themselves (and to look at themselves), that they can transcend their genetic and environmental limitations.

Minkowski, Strauss and Von Gebattel are the philosophers associated with the early stage of existentialism, while Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Binswanger, Medard Boss, Jan van den Berg, Frederick Buytendijk, Viktor Frankl and Rollo May are associated with present-day existentialism.

The origin of existentialism can be traced back to more than 150 years ago – to Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and his vehement protest against the prevailing intellectualism, which reduced all psychic processes to cognitive processes. He disagreed especially with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) who held that abstract truth is reality. According to Kierkegaard, truth exists ‘only as the individual himself produced it in action’ (May & Ellenberger, 1958:12).

Kierkegaard and **Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844–1900) opposed the view that the human can only discover truth as a thinking being. They also opposed the tendency to view the human being as a mere object that can be controlled like a robot. For the existentialists, the individual person is *object-directed* and therefore continually observing something or thinking about something. All behaviour is therefore intentionally directed towards an object. People are directed towards their world and are people-in-the-world as well as people-with-others. By placing people in relation to their world and to others, existentialists emphasise that a person cannot be studied in isolation from the world or other people and that their true experiencing occurs only within the subjective framework of their existence.

Jaspers (1883–1969) was another early thinker who helped shape existentialism. He stressed the idea that human beings are more than their cognition because they are also conscious of being conscious. By means of this *self-reflection* they can, for example, evaluate themselves and reflect on the meaning of life and their relationship with God (May, 1969). Through the choices they make, people become the designers of their own existence (Hall & Lindzey, 1970). **Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905–1980) points out that even if people never commit themselves to any specific course in life, this involves a decision which is in itself a choice (Rychlak, 1973).

Another important idea stressed by **Kierkegaard**, **Nietzsche** and **Jaspers** is that human beings strive for real, *authentic lives* – lives based on what people themselves think, feel and desire. Human beings’ desire to be themselves is inherent and they feel guilty when they act under the direction of others or the community in general. Heidegger (Rychlak, 1973:445), however, cautions that:

No one can be completely free of group impositions. The authentic person thus synthesizes what is imposed and the self-willed to reach a pattern of existence (*Dasein*) which is uniquely his own.

In summary, the existentialists emphasise the following:

- the experiencing person in a process of emerging
- the subjective world perceived by the experiencing human being
- self-reflection and self-transcendence – rising above the limitations of the self by setting goals and ideals
- *rising above circumstances* by choosing specific attitudes towards them.

The human being, therefore, has freedom of choice and is the architect of his or her own existence. This also means, however, that every person takes responsibility for his or her own existence. Individuals do not invariably make choices that are to their own advantage. The sorrow, alienation, fear, boredom and feelings of guilt with which people struggle testify to this. Existentialists also emphasise an authentic (true and honest) existence in which people can truly be themselves and do not have to live according to the directions of others. Life is therefore essentially what people themselves make of it.

As we have already indicated, we include Viktor Frankl's theory with those of the person-oriented theorists as an example of a personality theory that specifically represents the existentialist school of thought. Frankl (1967) highlights the search for meaning in life, transcendence of the self, and rising above circumstances through selecting a particular attitude towards them.

2.2 Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), originally a mathematician, became acquainted with the philosopher Franz Brentano (1838–1917) during his residence in Vienna. The impression made by Brentano's philosophical ideas on Husserl's thinking gave birth to a new philosophy – *phenomenology* (Möller, 1993). He rejected the idea that perception is the result of stimuli impinging from the outside. With the existentialist view of the importance of the individual's subjective world of perception as a starting point, Husserl stressed the idea that people go out to their world and consequently attach personal meanings to the things they experience. This idea can actually be traced back to **Immanuel Kant's** (1724–1804) distinction between *noumena* (objects as they actually are, independent of sensations and knowledge) and *phenomena* (sensory knowledge of things in the external world). According to phenomenology, it is futile to speculate about *noumena*, and scientific study, especially of humankind, should focus on *phenomena* (people's knowledge and experience), as this is the only reality which people know (Rychlak, 1973).

Phenomenology examines *phenomena* or *manifestations* as given – in other words, just as they occur, without imposing personal theories or specific systems upon the phenomena. They should be comprehended in their full reality as they manifest themselves. This reality is the world as the person sees it and if, for example, a patient's view of reality is to be understood, the therapist has to be open-minded and prepared to enter into the patient's world.

According to the phenomenological method of psychological analysis, people can therefore be evaluated only if their subjective perceptions can be discovered. An investigator must use measuring techniques that will enable him or her to view reality through the eyes of the subject. The phenomenological method of measurement is used mainly in the person-oriented approach.

The theories of Carl Rogers, George Kelly and Viktor Frankl all incorporate the phenomenological approach. Rogers' considerable emphasis on the individual's subjective experience of his or her world is in full agreement with the phenomenological approach. This is also true of the important role he gives to the impact on behaviour of individuals' perception of themselves. Kelly's cognitive theory also underlines the unique way in which people interpret their life situations. His principle of *constructive alternativism* stresses that there is no one correct hypothesis that explains the world, but that different individuals interpret the world in different ways. For Frankl, the key idea is that individuals search for meaning in their lives in unique ways. His point of departure is the assumption that personality is formed by the individual's unique responses to the demands of the environment. This unique view of the world and the unique solutions offered by the individual correspond with the phenomenological view that individuals assign personal meanings to experience.

2.3 Holism

The term *holism* derives from the Greek word *holos*, meaning 'complete, whole, totality'. It is interesting to note that the South African statesman and philosopher, General **Jan Smuts**, was the first to use this term in his book *Holism and Evolution*, which appeared in 1926 (Corsini & Marsella, 1983; Smuts, 1961). Although the term holism was originally used in the context of evolution and biology, Delpino (1975) maintains that Smuts had a far larger whole in mind, namely the eternal and the role of humans in the eternal. Smuts was therefore trying to bridge the gaps between the physical, biological and psychological with this acknowledgement of a larger reality.

In our historical overview of psychological thinking, we said that the distinction between the physical world (the environment) and the psychological world (human reason), and body/mind dualism are strongly evident in the empiricism of Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and the rationalism of René Descartes (1596–1650). Bacon's aim was to quantify the observable environment or physical functioning in a controlled way and he was not concerned with the study of psychological processes. Descartes, however, did emphasise the study of the soul or human processes of consciousness through self-reflection (subjective experience). He regarded bodily processes as belonging to the field of physiology. The behaviourists, following the structural school which examined the structural elements of phenomena, studied parts or fragments of behaviour and not the whole. Behaviourists such as Watson (1878–1958) and Skinner (1904–1990) upheld environmental determinism and concentrated solely on externally observable behaviour, while ignoring internal, non-observable processes. We can now ask the following question: What gave rise to the bridging of the dualist dichotomy, and to the shift away from a fragmented towards an integrated view of the person?

As indicated, Husserl addressed dualism from a philosophical point of view by introducing a phenomenological view of humanity in which the human being emerges as a psychological and physical whole in his or her experiential world. The holistic view also has roots in the ideas of the Greek philosopher **Aristotle** (384–322 BC), the Dutch philosopher **Spinoza** (1642–1677) and the American philosopher and psychologist **William James** (1842–1910).

The ideas of the German Gestalt psychologists, like **Wertheimer**, **Köhler** and **Koffka** (Hamlyn, 1957; Köhler, 1947), can also be said to have strengthened the holistic view. Although, strictly speaking, they did not give thought to the human personality as a whole but concentrated on perceptual abilities, the part/whole theme does appear in their work. They found that there is an inherent tendency for humans to observe phenomena as a whole, and that background is an integral part of the subject that is observed in the foreground. If the background changes, the meaning of the subject changes as well. On the basis of this finding, personality psychologists who adhered to the holistic view concluded that humans function as wholes, and that the psyche and the body, as well as the person and his or her world, are just as interlocked as figure and ground (Möller, 1995). A group of German psychologists representing what was known as *Ganzheitspsychologie*, which included figures such as **Felix Krueger**, **F. Sander** and **Albert Wellek**, was particularly influential in propagating holistic ideas during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Meyer, 1986). The personality psychologists **Kurt Goldstein** (1878–1965) and **Fritz Perls** (1893–1970) are also regarded as pioneers in the field of holistic theories, and Fritz Perls' Gestalt therapy made a considerable impact on psychotherapy (Corsini & Marsella, 1983).

In the person-oriented personality theories we are about to discuss, the holistic view is especially prominent in the theories of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and Viktor Frankl. Thus they all portray the human being as a whole, integrated person.

2.4 Humanism

The **humanistic psychology**, that originated in America during the late fifties of the twentieth century in reaction to psychoanalysis and even more so to behaviourism, is often referred to as *third force psychology*. **Abraham Maslow** is regarded as the founder of this movement and he gave the movement its name. However, the ideas put forward by the humanists were not new. They merely gave prominence to ideas which had long been current and which derived mainly from holism and phenomenology (Maddi & Costa, 1972). It should always be borne in mind that many of the theories classified as humanistic are quite divergent, although they share certain basic assumptions about human nature that correspond, in the main, with the principles of person-oriented theorists.

As already mentioned, the humanists concentrate more on the actualisation of the individual's own inner potential than on the impulse towards something or 'Someone' greater than the self. Maddi (1989:42) distinguishes in this regard

between the actualisation and the perfection variants of the fulfilment model. Theories that fit in with the actualisation variant deal with the fulfilment of inherent potential, while theories belonging to the perfection variant are less interested in the fulfilment of genetically determined powers than in the striving towards ideas about goodness, excellence and meaning. If we follow Maddi's (1989) distinction, humanistic person-oriented theories would represent the actualisation variant, while person-oriented theories that incorporate existentialist thinking would be classified as examples of the perfection variant of the fulfilment model.

Another important emphasis in humanistic psychology is the conceptualisation of human nature as positive. Human nature is basically good or, at the least, neutral. Vicious, destructive behaviour is attributed to bad environmental influences rather than to any inherent disposition. This point of view is a reaction to the pessimistic view, held by Freud in particular, that the innate human drives would destroy the self and others if they were not controlled. We should point out, however, that rejecting the idea of an inherently destructive nature does not necessarily imply that a person will always follow a positive path in his or her development. There is always the possibility that individuals will make wrong choices and that the environment will exert a negative influence that will deter them from actualising their true potential.

The emergence and aims of humanistic psychology are neatly summarised as follows by Matson (cited in Nel, 1971:8):

Humanistic psychology proposed ... to rehabilitate the self in its subjectivity and hence in its dignity, to replace the mechanomorphic model of the robot with the anthropomorphic model of the person – and so to turn attention from determinism to self determination, from causality to purpose, from behaviour to experience, from manipulation to actualization.

We treat the theories of **Abraham Maslow** and **Carl Rogers** as examples of humanistic personality theories. Maslow and Rogers both associated themselves with 'third force psychology' in America, and both emphasise the actualisation of potential. In line with the principles on which the person-oriented approach is based, both theorists highlight certain elements:

- They highlight the *integratedness* of human beings.
- They acknowledge the *subjective experiential world* of the individual.
- They endeavour to restore *dignity* to the image of the human being.
- They focus on *conscious processes* and on the individual as an active participant in the determination of behaviour.

Although they deal with higher spiritual processes, such as creativity, values and emotions, they are not concerned with spiritual dimensions outside or beyond the self. Note, however, that Maslow does refer to the possibility of a higher spiritual dimension that goes further than his concept of self-actualisation, and that can accommodate a religious urge towards something higher than the self. Maslow is actually regarded as the philosophical father of *transpersonal psychology*, which

emerged in America during the late 1960s and which is sometimes referred to as the 'fourth force'. Transpersonal psychologists attempted to accommodate various major religions, particularly from the Eastern traditions (Wulff, 1991), in this fourth force. We refer to this again in the chapter on Maslow, under the heading 'Religion'. Returning to the more commonly held humanistic views, Rogers and Maslow place the blame for undesirable development on the environment. For Rogers especially, the positive nature of human beings remains non-negotiable despite some vehement criticism of this stance. In the chapter on Rogers we refer to just such a challenge by Rollo May, one of the greatest existentialists of our time.

In summarising, it may be said that the humanistic theories can be classified as person-oriented theories because they subscribe to most of the basic principles of the person-oriented approach. However, humanistic theories do not all reflect certain existential ideas that you will encounter in the person-oriented theories.

3 Suggested reading

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Chapter 11

The self-actualisation theory of Abraham Maslow (1908–1970)

Cora Moore

The chapter at a glance

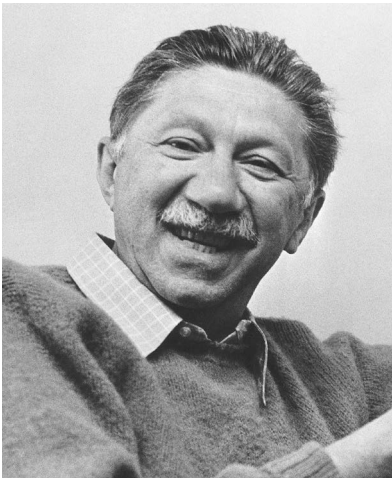
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11.1 Outcomes

- Understand what makes Maslow the father of the humanistic movement.
- Know how Maslow's own life experiences influenced his theory.
- Understand the important role Maslow ascribes to the hierarchy of needs and the way in which this influences human functioning.
- Distinguish between deficiency and growth motives.
- Describe the characteristics of self-actualisers and understand why so few people develop into self-actualisers.
- Understand what the practical implications and applications of Maslow's theory are for various contexts.
- Critically evaluate Maslow's theory, taking more recent research findings into consideration.

11.2 Background

How did Maslow's own life experiences influence his ideas?



Abraham Harold Maslow
Source: Bettmann/ Getty Images/
Gallo Images

Abraham Harold Maslow (1908–1970) was born in Brooklyn, New York. His parents were Russian Jews who had emigrated to America and, during his childhood, the family was poor. Maslow was a lonely, isolated boy who immersed himself in his books. His relationship with his mother lacked warmth and it was from a cousin, Bertha Goodman, that he received love and caring. He married her in 1928 at the age of twenty, and regarded his marriage as a turning point in his life.

At his father's insistence, Maslow enrolled at City College to study law, but after two weeks he knew he would never become a lawyer and he moved to the University of Wisconsin instead, where he received his academic training in psychology. Anyone who is familiar with Maslow's theory will find it surprising that at first he supported behaviourism and completed his doctorate with Harry Harlow, a radical behaviourist. His field of study was the sexual and dominance characteristics of baboons – an unexpected theme for Maslow the humanist.



The wonder of a newborn baby
Source: Pearson Education Ltd. 2011

He was attracted to behaviourism because he saw in it a simple method of reforming the world, but with the birth of his first child his enthusiasm for behaviourism disappeared permanently. A turning point in Maslow's thinking occurred with the birth of his first child, after which he expressed the view that it was not possible to be a behaviourist once you had experienced the feeling of helplessness when looking at the inexplicable wonder of a newborn baby.

The attack on Pearl Harbour and the hatred and prejudice unleashed by the war made a deep impression on Maslow. He was convinced that there was something greater in human nature than these primitive, destructive instincts, which would enable people to strive towards nobler ideals.

The most important theme in Maslow's work is his emphasis on *human potential* and the possibility of a more bounteous existence. Maslow believes (1971:7) that in order to learn something about the human's potential we should study the handful of people who have succeeded in fulfilling their potential.

The highest possibilities of human nature have practically always been underrated. Even when the saints and sages and great leaders of history have been available for study, the temptation too often has been to consider them not human but supernaturally endowed.

KEY TERM

self-actualiser: the person who functions optimally; has overcome the restrictions of the environment, can meet deficiency needs regularly and accepts the responsibility of becoming the best that he or she can be

Maslow is not content merely to admire these exceptional people, whom he calls **self-actualisers**. He wants to understand why they are exceptional. And it is therefore *healthy functioning*, rather than pathology, that is the basis for his theory. For Maslow (1971), the idea that people achieve success through luck alone is unacceptable. Their basic needs, values, goals and plans must all play a role. Maslow also maintains that the environment is important for the fulfilment of basic needs, and that therefore people need 'good' societies to realise their 'good' potential. Maslow's conviction that people are essentially good and worthy contrasts vividly with the psychoanalytic school's emphasis on unconscious drives and the behaviourists' insistence on the supremacy of environmental influences. This is what makes Maslow the founder of the 'third force' of the *humanistic movement* that originated in America in 1955. Maslow did not, however, intend that this third movement should eschew psychoanalysis or behaviourism, but that it should add a new dimension.

Maslow spent the last eighteen years of his academic career at the psychology department at Brandeis University, and died in 1970 of a heart attack.

Enrichment

Depth psychologists often focus on malfunctioning persons in order to discover more about human nature, whereas behaviourists study animal behaviour and then extend their findings to human behaviour. In contrast, Maslow held the view that true human nature is revealed by optimally functioning self-actualisers and that their behaviour should serve as a basis for the study of human functioning. Maslow's own words (cited in Shantall, 1996:93) illustrate his strong view on this issue:

Ought a biological species be judged by its crippled, warped, only partly developed specimens, or by examples that have been over-domesticated, caged and trained? Surely the healthy or optimally developed person should be the target of psychological study since only these people provide us with a picture of fully developed humanity.

Activity

1. Think about the view Maslow expresses in the words quoted in the Enrichment. Do you agree with him? State your reasons why you agree or disagree with Maslow in this regard.
2. Debate with a colleague or fellow student whether a therapist could mix ideas from depth psychology, the behaviouristic perspective and the person-oriented approach when engaging in therapy with a client. Write down your conclusions in a single paragraph.

11.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

What did Maslow believe about the basic nature of human beings?

KEY TERM

self-actualisation: the motive to realise all true potential

Maslow's view of the person is essentially optimistic. He acknowledges the positive aspects of human nature – the person's dignity, his or her active will to develop – and he stresses the person's functioning as an integrated whole. According to Maslow the tendency towards **self-actualisation** is the motive that underlies all behaviour. Realising his or her true potential is the individual's ultimate goal. It is what human development finally leads to. Theoretically, it lies within every individual's reach and requires no change in a person's basic nature. All that is needed is for the individual to discover what is already there and to allow it to flourish.

Maslow believes that much human behaviour can be explained in terms of *need gratification*. He presents the human as a 'yearning being' who is seldom satisfied, because no sooner is one need gratified than another surfaces. Need gratification is not merely a means of relieving tension or frustration, it is also the basis for growth and the realisation of an individual's full potential through self-actualisation.

People have certain basic needs, which are hierarchically arranged. They are biological, safety, love and esteem needs. These must be satisfied before the need for self-actualisation, which is at the top of the hierarchy, becomes apparent. However, because a person depends to a large extent on the environment for the gratification of his or her basic needs, few people in our imperfect society actually achieve the ideal of self-actualisation.

KEY TERM

holistic: the person seen as an integrated whole

Maslow's view of the person is a **holistic** one. The person is an integrated whole and cannot be studied piecemeal. All aspects of the personality are closely interwoven. For example, it is not John's stomach that is hungry, but John himself, and the 'whole of John' is striving towards self-actualisation, not just some part of him.

Self-evaluation question

- Why is Abraham Maslow regarded as the father of the 'third force psychology'? Explain and indicate how his own life experiences contributed to his views.

11.4 The structure of the personality

How is the personality structured, according to Maslow, and how do the different parts work together?

Although Maslow acknowledges that human functioning can only partially be explained in terms of needs, they do constitute the structural elements that are the basis for his personality theory. However, as the 'functioning of needs' has to do with the 'dynamics' of the personality, the hierarchy of needs, as well as the way the needs function, will be discussed under the heading of dynamics.

11.5 The dynamics of the personality

11.5.1 The hierarchy of needs

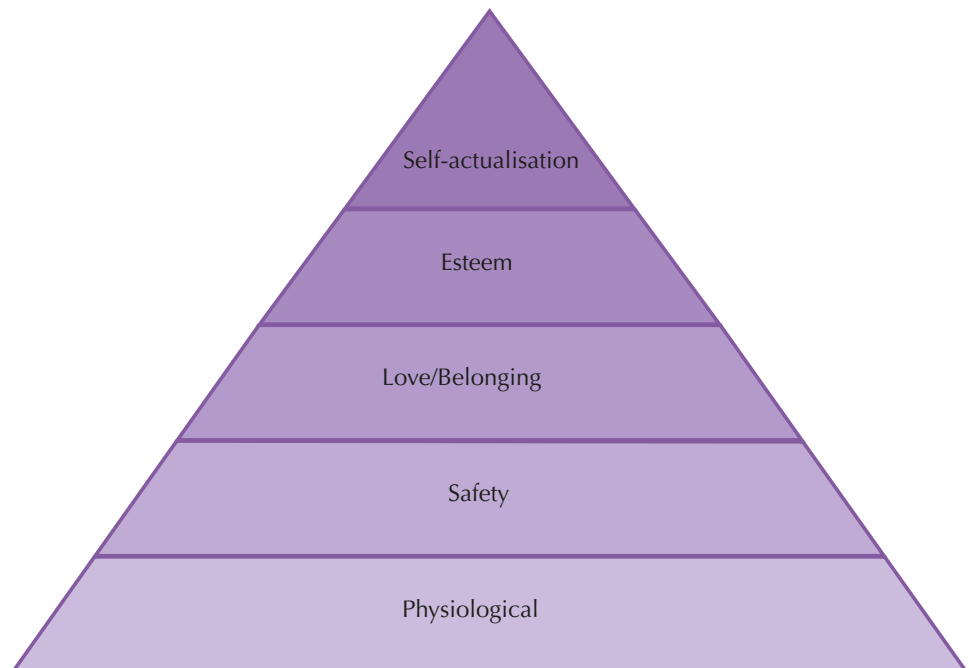
KEY TERM

needs hierarchy:
represents successive
stages of development,
from lower to higher needs

According to Maslow (1970), the fact that needs are arranged in a **needs hierarchy** means that the person's development progresses through successive stages of need gratification towards the goal of self-actualisation. The lower the need in the hierarchy, the more urgent it is, which means that lower needs must first be gratified before needs at a higher level manifest themselves.

The basic needs are (ranked from lowest to highest):

- physiological needs
- safety needs
- affiliation and love needs
- self-esteem needs
- self-actualisation or self-realisation needs.



When a specific set of needs is gratified regularly, the next set of needs becomes dominant. Instead of being dominated by hunger, for example, a person now becomes obsessed with the need for safety (Maslow, 1970). Of course this does not mean that the person will never experience hunger again, but when he or she is reasonably sure that the physiological needs will be satisfied regularly, the safety needs become an important motivator of behaviour. The same principle applies to all the other needs in the hierarchy. A person becomes aware of his or her love and affiliation needs only when the safety needs are gratified regularly, and the self-esteem needs come to the fore only when the love needs are satisfied regularly. This means that the self-actualisation stage is reached only when the other four levels of needs are all being gratified regularly.

Maslow (1970) acknowledges that needs are not always gratified in strict accordance with the hierarchy, and that higher needs may sometimes motivate behaviour even when lower needs have not been gratified. Artists who produce masterpieces whilst living in extreme poverty, or martyrs who are willing to die for their beliefs or ideals are examples. But Maslow believes that we know little about such cases, and that in general the hierarchy applies.

KEY TERMS

deficiency motives: the first four levels of the need hierarchy, which include the following basic needs: physiological needs, safety needs, affiliation and love needs, and self-esteem needs

growth motives (meta-needs or B-values): actualisation (self-realisation) needs, which include higher level needs such as the need for truth, beauty and knowing

physiological needs: survival needs

Maslow (1968) distinguishes two general categories of motives, namely **deficiency motives** and **growth motives**. Deficiency motives refer to the first four levels of the need hierarchy, while growth motives refer to actualisation needs. Deficiency motives are directly related to the basic needs for survival, such as hunger, thirst and the need for safety, whose gratification brings about a decrease in tension. Maslow believes that when a person's behaviour is being directed by deficiency motives, his or her cognitive abilities are actually being applied negatively because the objective is merely to evade unpleasant circumstances and to survive. This type of motivation will not lead to the realisation of a person's true potential. A detailed discussion of deficiency motives and their operation at the first four levels of the hierarchy follows.

Physiological needs

Physiological needs have to do with *survival*. Hunger, thirst, the need for oxygen, sleep, activity, sensory stimulation and sexual gratification are examples. Although Maslow (1970:44) classifies sexual needs as physiological, he states that sexual behaviour is determined by sexual needs as well as other needs, such as the need for love and affection. Physiological needs are usually homeostatic and their gratification restores equilibrium inside the body.

According to Maslow, physiological needs are the most basic needs and if they are not gratified regularly they dominate all other needs. Accordingly, someone who is always hungry because of a lack of food will not be interested in gratifying higher ranking needs. For this person Utopia would be a place with an abundance of food. Composing poetry or music would be secondary to obtaining food. Even his or her vision of the future would be affected, so that freedom, love, public spirit, respect and philosophy would be lightly valued. Here we have the proverbial man who 'lives by bread alone' (Maslow, 1970:37).

In developed countries, people's physiological needs are usually satisfied regularly. Even so, their physiological needs become dominant again as soon as their basic survival is threatened.

Safety needs

When a person is reasonably sure that his or her physiological needs will be satisfied regularly, they lose their urgency. At this point **safety needs** come to the fore, and may become dominant to such an extent that all functioning is directed towards achieving security, stability, protection, structure, law and order, limits, and freedom from fear. Needs for safety are especially apparent in young children because they are

KEY TERM

safety needs: needs concerning security, stability, protection, structure, law and order, limits, and freedom from fear

dependent on others, and react uninhibitedly when they feel unsafe. For example, they cry and scream when a loud noise or bright light frightens them. After an accident or an illness, maltreatment, neglect, a divorce or death in the family, a child may experience the world as unsafe and unpredictable and show various fear reactions.

Maslow's theory accords with the general view held by educationalists that children feel safe in an environment where there is some kind of structure, with set limits and boundaries and where fixed patterns apply. A measured freedom rather than unbounded freedom seems to be ideal for gratifying the need for safety. Even adults prefer a measure of order and predictability in their world. This is demonstrated when, for example, they choose a career that offers financial security and long-term opportunities or when they open a savings account or buy an insurance policy. Philosophies of life and religious institutions may also provide a frame of reference within which a person feels 'safe'.

Someone whose safety needs are acutely unfulfilled could ultimately develop an obsessive–compulsive neurosis in which he or she tries to arrange the world in so limited and precise a manner as to preclude any possibility of experiencing insecurity. In a crisis, people who are functioning on the level of safety needs will identify more easily with a leader figure because they are seeking some kind of protection (Maslow, 1970:42).

Needs for affiliation and love

Once the physiological and safety needs are being regularly satisfied, a person becomes aware of his or her need to belong somewhere and to belong with someone; to receive and to give **love**. Modern first-world societies take care of many physiological needs but people seem to be less caring about one another. People seem to have little time for more than a superficial intercourse with one another, and the lack of intimacy leaves them with a sense of loneliness and isolation. It could well be that the growing number of single parents is an indication that the need for love is not being fulfilled. One result is the formation of groups and societies where people with similar needs and problems can come together and experience a sense of belonging. Maslow (1970:44) even suggests that rebel youth groups are formed as a result of the need to belong to a group and to participate in the struggle against a common enemy. Many clinical psychologists regard unfulfilled needs for love as the root of psychopathology.

KEY TERM

affiliation and love needs:
the need to belong

Maslow (1970) points out that a person not only needs to belong to others, but that identification with a home and neighbourhood also contributes to the gratification of **affiliation needs**. This is supported by research carried out by environmental psychologists on place identity (Van Staden, 1985). In South Africa it is important to recognise that practices such as migrant labour and live-in domestic servants can separate a person from his or her family and real home, and that this makes it difficult to satisfy the affiliation needs. In general, people are more mobile than in centuries gone by and move house more often, and this may stimulate feelings of being uprooted and lonely (Gerdes, 1988). This could be particularly prevalent in present-day South African families where children have emigrated to find a new life elsewhere (Small, 2015).

Enrichment

The modern age of technology allows human beings to reach out to the furthest corners of the earth and to explore the vastness of the universe. In the words of Kenneth Gergen (cited in Gülerce, 1995:149):

The number, range and variation in our relationships expands exponentially, as we are daily immersed in images, information, opportunities and interchanges from around the globe.

Yet, at the same time, the technology diminishes the vastness and compacts the world into a global village where space and distance seem to disappear. The question we need to ask is: How is modern technology affecting the fulfilment of affiliation needs? Although people are able to be part of the global village, do they in fact feel that they belong? Perhaps now, more than ever before, there is a need not to be lost in the vastness, or be stripped of a unique sense of belonging and place in the world. Therefore, people are yearning for meaningful, interpersonal, face-to-face relationships.

Activity

Investigate how technology and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, influence your and your friends' affiliation and love needs.

KEY TERM

self-esteem needs: the need to evaluate oneself positively

The need for self-esteem

Self-esteem refers to the need to evaluate oneself positively. As soon as a person's need for love has been satisfied to the point where it diminishes as a motivating force, the **need for esteem** awakens. Maslow (1970:45) classifies this need into two sub-categories:

- **A set of needs based on a person's achievements.** This is related to a sense of efficiency, capability, achievement, confidence, personal strength and independence.
- **A set of needs related to the esteem of others.** This includes social standing, honour, importance, dignity and appreciation. People need others to recognise and appreciate their competence.

When the needs for self-esteem have been satisfied, people feel confident, competent, strong, useful and needed in their world. By contrast, unfulfilled needs for self-esteem give rise to a feeling of inferiority, weakness and helplessness. Maslow emphasises, however, that the most stable and therefore healthiest basis for self-esteem is a deserved respect rather than an unjustified veneration or fame arising from one's background and Hjelle and Ziegler (1992) point out that, not only the judgement of others, but also one's own judgement plays a role.

Hence, there is a real psychological danger of basing one's esteem needs on the opinions of others rather than on real ability, achievement and adequacy. Once a person relies exclusively on the opinions of others for self-esteem, he or she is in psychological jeopardy. To be solid, self-esteem must be founded on one's actual worth, not on external factors outside one's control.

KEY TERM

self-actualisation needs: function on the highest level of the needs hierarchy; must be fulfilled to ensure maximal growth; they include 17 growth motives (see also 'growth motives')

The need for self-actualisation

A person whose basic needs are satisfied on a regular basis can start functioning at the level of **self-actualisation** and at this stage *growth motivation* comes to the fore. Self-actualisation is an umbrella concept that includes 17 growth motives. These motives, functioning on the highest level of the needs hierarchy, are also known as *meta-needs* or *B-values*.

Maslow (1967) believes that the meta-needs are innate, as are the basic needs, and that they, too, must be fulfilled to ensure maximal growth. The need to know and to understand is a meta-need. It includes the need for truth, justice and meaningfulness. Aesthetic needs, such as the need for beauty, order, simplicity and perfection, are also meta-needs (Hall *et al.*, 1985:206), as well as the needs for wholeness, completion, totality, uniqueness, aliveness, goodness, autonomy, humour and effortlessness (Feist & Feist, 1998).

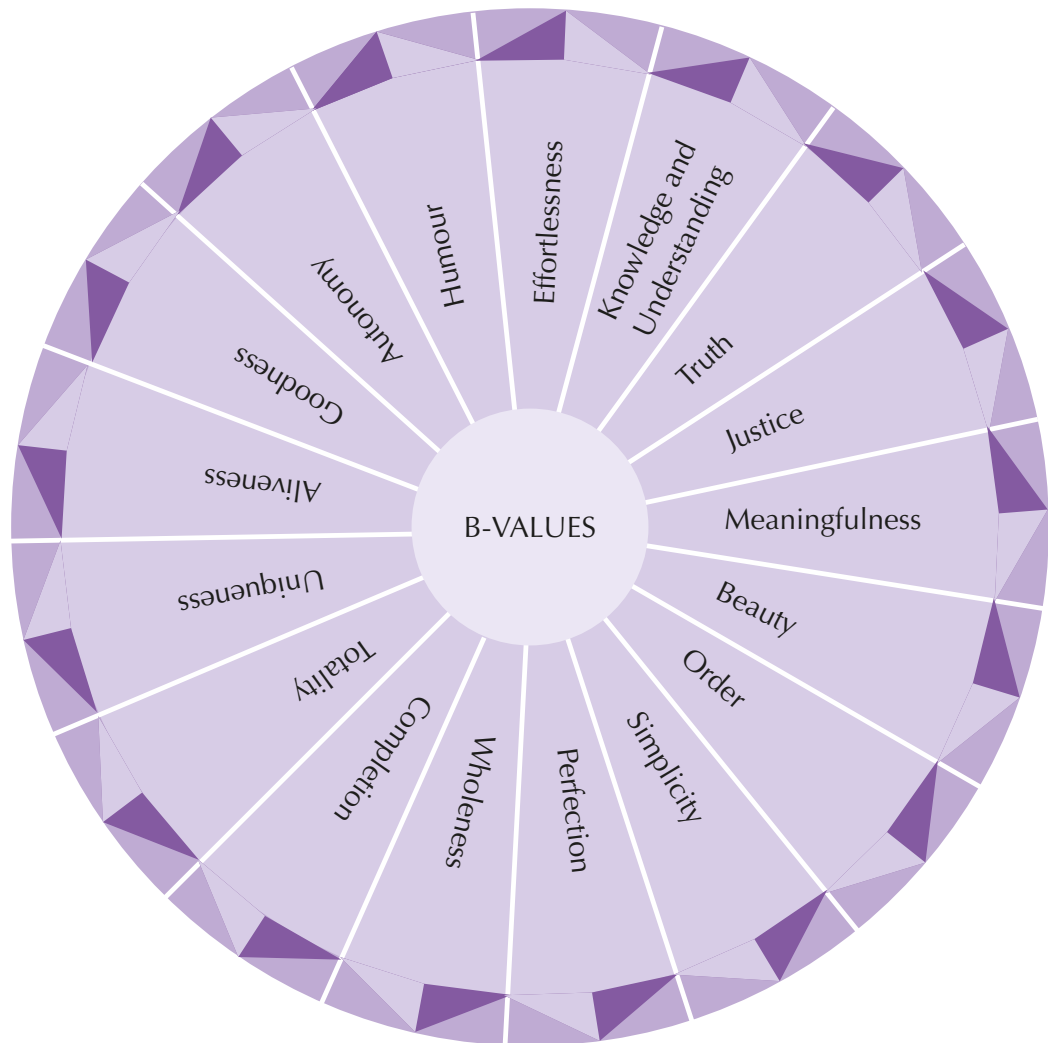


Figure 11.2 Growth motives or meta-needs
Source: Moore (2016)

Maslow (1971:194) has the following to say about B-values:

The B-values are not separate piles of sticks, but rather the different facets of one jewel.

Self-actualisation is the process of becoming all one is capable of being, making full use of all one's abilities, talents and potential. According to Maslow (1970), a person becomes restless when he or she is not doing what he or she is capable of doing. In this respect Maslow (1970:46) says:

A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be. He must be true to his own nature.

Just how self-actualisation comes about differs from person to person. And indeed Maslow states that it is here that the greatest differences between individuals actually manifest themselves.



Self-actualisers can become involved in meaningful community work
Source: Neil Cooper/Alamy Stock Photo

Self-actualisation can result in works of art or important scientific discoveries. But it could also mean that someone strives to become an ideal parent, or a master builder, or becomes involved in community work. Self-actualisation is an exciting idea because it encourages the person to discover and realise his or her highest potential and, in doing so, to become a fully functioning, goal-oriented being.

Self-evaluation question

- What role does need fulfilment play in Maslow's theory? Refer specifically to the hierarchy of needs.

11.6 The development of the personality

How does the development of the personality proceed, according to Maslow?

According to Maslow, *development proceeds in accordance with the needs hierarchy*. The baby experiences only physiological needs and as soon as these are being met on a regular basis, needs higher up in the hierarchy start to become part of the individual's experience. The higher in the hierarchy the level of motivation, the higher the individual's level of development and the healthier his or her functioning.

Someone who has reached the highest level of development functions on the level of self-actualisation and is motivated by growth motives. Maslow does not distinguish any stages of development in his theory, however. The gratification of each set of basic needs is a step towards self-actualisation. It must be emphasised, though, that the fulfilment of basic needs does not automatically ensure the fulfilment of meta-needs. Maslow (1970:71) points out that:

Gratification of all the basic needs does not automatically solve the problem of identity, of a value system, of a calling in life, of the meaning of life. For some people at least, especially young people, these are separate and additional life-tasks beyond the gratification of the basic needs.

It may also happen that someone who has already functioned on a higher level makes a temporary return or regression to a lower level. So, for example, a woman who has been motivated by higher ideals and goals in her career might after a divorce return to a lower level of functioning if her safety and love needs are not being fulfilled. In addition, a person's behaviour is not necessarily motivated by needs on only one level. For example, someone who is functioning on the level of self-actualisation still has biological needs that have to be satisfied and therefore sometimes functions on the lowest level as well.

The levels of development could, perhaps, be depicted as a ladder which the individual can ascend or descend. The self-actualising person would be on the highest step, while some people have only the scope of the lower levels and are unable to reach heights. A tramp who is just managing to keep body and soul together probably does not even notice the beautiful gardens in the park, whereas those privileged enough to have sufficient fulfilment at the basic level can appreciate their beauty.

It is exactly this aspect of Maslow's theory that is most often criticised. In reality there are many examples of people – martyrs, great musicians, writers – who, in spite of poverty, suffering or other difficult circumstances, have reached for higher values and produced some of the world's greatest works and deeds.

Maslow maintains that the hierarchy of needs applies as a rule, but he is willing to recognise certain exceptions. Maslow (1970:59) is also willing to admit that:

... higher needs may occasionally emerge, not after gratification, but rather after forced or voluntary deprivation.

He is therefore prepared to acknowledge that there are perhaps *other paths to healthy development*, apart from the needs hierarchy.

Maslow may well have been of the opinion, however, that masters who attained great heights despite their hardships would have achieved even more had their basic needs been satisfied.

Self-evaluation questions

- Could one compare the levels of development identified by Maslow with a ladder? Explain why.
- On which level of the needs hierarchy are you functioning at present?

11.6.1 Why self-actualisation is not always attained

As Maslow's theory clearly shows, he believes in the person's active will to grow and to realise his or her potential. Yet it is a tragic fact that few people actually do so. Why?

- **Lack of self-knowledge and self-insight.** The result of this is that the person is not aware of his or her own needs and depends on external directives, such as advice or suggestions from other people, or rules, agendas and programmes. If individuals cannot identify their own needs, they cannot realise their potential.
- **Obstructions**, which prevent the person from actualising his or her full self. Maslow mentions especially the retarding influence of ungratified safety needs. To realise his or her potential a person must have the courage to take risks and to experiment with new ideas. According to Maslow children who grow up in a safe, warm, friendly atmosphere will be better able to do this.
- **'Jonah complex' – running away from one's talents** and consequently also from one's responsibility. There are few people who aspire to be the next great psychologist or writer. According to Maslow, this is because we feel inferior in the presence of great people, instead of learning to love the higher values they stand for, thereby making it possible to love them in ourselves as well. It might, however, also be because we fear that the moment of attainment might be too great for us, that the ecstasy might simply overpower us.
- It could also be that we suspect ourselves of having a superiority complex and so make no attempt to fulfil our potential. We are *afraid of overestimating ourselves*. Maslow (1971:39) discusses the integration of humility and pride. To invent or create you must have 'the arrogance of creativeness' that so many investigators have noticed. But, of course, if you have only arrogance without humility, then you are, in fact, paranoid.

- **Lack of integration** within the individual, especially with regard to seemingly opposing needs, is put forward by Maslow as another cause of unfulfilled potential. A good illustration of this is the cultural stereotype of manliness according to which a man is not allowed to show such qualities as sympathy, softness and tenderness.

Self-evaluation question

- What, according to Maslow, are possible reasons for people not self-actualising?

11.7 Optimal development

What would Maslow regard as ideal, optimal development?

KEY TERM

humanism: humans are seen as beings with worth and dignity who, as whole, integrated persons, actively and consciously strive towards the actualisation of their potential

Self-actualisation is the ideal level of functioning that all people should strive for, according to **humanism**. To achieve this level, Maslow says the individual must be able to regularly satisfy his or her needs on all four lower levels of the hierarchy. Such a person has overcome the restrictions of the environment, can meet his or her deficiency needs regularly and has also accepted the responsibility of self-actualisation and becoming the best that he or she can be. In order to achieve a clearer understanding of the characteristics of self-actualisers, Maslow (1970:153–180) made a study of 49 well-known people whom he regarded as self-actualisers – people such as Jefferson, Lincoln, Spinoza, Einstein and Eleanor Roosevelt. His sample consisted of a small select group, which could certainly not be regarded as representative. Maslow has also been criticised for choosing people according to his own ideas about self-actualisation and therefore inevitably finding what he was looking for.

Maslow assembled biographical information regarding these people, conducted interviews, did tests and questioned friends and relatives about them. In this way, he gradually assembled a global picture of the self-actualising person whom he could now describe according to 15 characteristics. The following is a discussion of these characteristics.

11.7.1 Accurate observation of reality

Self-actualisers can see past the barriers that people erect, and *recognise reality* for what it is. This ability to observe more accurately applies not only to human relationships, but also to music, art, the intellect, science and politics. Self-actualisers do not need to observe reality through the template of their own desires, anxieties, fantasies or cultural stereotypes. This is what makes their observation so much more accurate.

They do not fear reality, nor do they fear the unknown with its ambiguity and lack of structure. They may even prefer it. In their search for truth they are prepared to take risks and are not handicapped by security, safety and other lower needs.

11.7.2 Self-acceptance, accepting others and human nature

Self-actualisers also *recognise human nature* for what it is rather than as they would prefer it to be. Self-actualisers accept themselves and human nature unconditionally in the same way that children in their innocence experience the natural world without complaining that the trees are green or the stones hard (Maslow, 1970).

On the biological level, self-actualisers enjoy their food, sleep well and enjoy sex. They accept processes such as defecating, pregnancy, menstruation and ageing as part of human nature and do not feel uneasy or guilty about them. They also accept illness and death more readily.

11.7.3 Spontaneity, simplicity and naturalness

The behaviour of self-actualisers is characterised by *spontaneity and simplicity* and the absence of superficiality and pretence. Self-actualisers often act in an unconventional, spontaneous way when they reveal their own thoughts and emotions, but they do not do so on purpose when it might hurt or harm themselves or others. They do not allow rules and regulations to obstruct them in reaching goals they regard as important. Although they do follow an ethical code it does not necessarily correspond with that of the community.

11.7.4 Task involvement

According to Maslow, self-actualisers are, without exception, *involved in some calling*, career or task that is not aimed primarily at the satisfaction of their own basic needs, but which is rather a means of serving some greater cause. Self-actualisers are thus not egocentric. Because they have a wider perspective, they become more easily immersed in philosophical and ethical matters that concern humankind as a whole. Self-actualisers do not trouble themselves over petty matters and this makes life easier for them as well as for those around them.

11.7.5 Exclusiveness: The need for privacy

Almost all self-actualisers enjoy isolation and *privacy*. Maslow ascribes this to the fact that they are less dependent on the support, warmth and reassurance of others than the average person is. They seem to be able to disengage themselves from stormy and uncomfortable situations and handle these calmly, objectively and with dignity. This can occasionally make them seem cold and stand-offish, even antagonistic.

11.7.6 Autonomy: Being independent of culture and environment

Self-actualisers function relatively *independently* of their physical and social environment. Their development and continued growth depend not on external rewards such as popularity and prestige or on a specific environment, but on their own potential.

11.7.7 Consistent renewal of appreciation

Self-actualisers do not tire of the *simple, basic enjoyments of life*. On the contrary, they experience them with the same delight, surprise and even ecstasy as on the first occasion, and continue to be strengthened and inspired by them. Maslow (1970:163) describes it as follows:

Thus for such a person, any sunset may be as beautiful as the first one he saw. The thousandth baby he sees is just as miraculous a product as the first one he saw. He remains as convinced of his luck in marriage thirty years after his marriage and is as surprised by his wife's beauty when she is sixty as he was forty years before. For such people, even the casual work day, moment-to-moment business of living can be thrilling, exciting and ecstatic.



Self-actualisers consistently appreciate beautiful things
Source: Corbis

11.7.8 Peak experience

Mystical experiences are relatively common among self-actualisers. This refers to *moments of intense excitement* and tension, but also of peace, bliss and serenity. Endless horizons seem to open up before them. They feel both more powerful and more helpless than ever before, and they are less aware of time and space. These ecstatic moments are usually the result of love and sexual climax, bursts of creativity, insight, discovery and feeling at one with nature. They sometimes also follow a long period of dedication to a specific task (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992).

KEY TERM

peak experiences: mystical experiences; moments of intense excitement, tension, peace, bliss or serenity

Maslow (1970) thinks that these mystical experiences occur more often among poets, musicians, philosophers and spiritual people than among the ‘practical self-actualisers’ such as politicians and social reformers.



Albert Schweitzer was a self-actualiser who was concerned for humankind in general.
Source: Bettmann. Getty Images. Gallo Images

11.7.9 Social feeling

In spite of becoming irritated by the deficiencies of ordinary people, self-actualisers are *concerned for humankind* in general, almost like an older brother or sister who cares for his or her weaker brothers and sisters, and feels sympathy and empathy for them. This is strongly reminiscent of Erikson’s concept of generativity.

11.7.10 Interpersonal relationships

It would be quite wrong to picture self-actualisers as somewhat cold and distant towards others. Maslow found that self-actualisers have deeper and more *intense relationships* than other adults. This is borne out by their marital relationships or their commitment to a partner (Maslow, 1970). However, they differ from others in that they have only a small circle of friends. They prefer to establish close relationships with other self-actualisers (or people who are close to becoming self-actualisers), and this kind of person is rare. As one of the subjects put it: ‘I haven’t got time for many friends. Nobody has, that is, if they are to be real friends’ (Maslow, 1970:166). Quality is more important than quantity where friendships are concerned. They are also particularly fond of children.

It often happens that self-actualisers acquire admirers, followers or disciples who demand more from the self-actualiser than they themselves can offer, and this kind of relationship can be exhausting. The self-actualiser deals with this situation by being friendly and pleasant, but tries to avoid it whenever possible. He or she can, however, be firm should the situation demand it.

11.7.11 The democratic character structure

Self-actualisers are *democratic* in the widest sense of the word. They do not discriminate on the grounds of class, qualifications, beliefs, orientations, culture, gender, age, race or colour, and are willing to learn from anyone who is their superior in a given field. Maslow (1970:168) states:

These individuals, themselves elite, select for their friends elite, but this is an elite of character, capacity, and talent, rather than of birth, race, blood, name, family, age, youth, fame or power.

11.7.12 Discrimination between means and goals, and between good and evil

Self-actualisers *distinguish clearly between a goal and the means* by which it may be achieved. They usually regard the means as inferior or subordinate to the goal. And yet they are often more able to see the activity that leads to a goal as an end in itself, and to enjoy it. They can derive as much enjoyment from the journey to a given destination as from the arrival. They are so creative that they can transform the most monotonous task into a game – a gift we also see in children or in the singing of a labourer hard at work.

Although self-actualisers are not usually religious in the orthodox sense of the word, they have *strong ethical and moral codes*, and they have no uncertainties about right and wrong.

11.7.13 A philosophical, benevolent sense of humour

The self-actualiser's *sense of humour* is not the same as that of ordinary people. He or she enjoys the kind of humour that provokes a smile rather than hearty laughter. He or she is not amused by a joke made at someone else's expense, or that emphasises someone's inferiority. The self-actualiser is more likely to find amusement in the absurdities caused by people's pride or in the kind of humour that has a message. Self-actualisers can also laugh at themselves.

11.7.14 Creativity

Every one of the self-actualisers whom Maslow studied had a certain kind of *creativity* or originality or ingenuity. This is not the creativity often associated with the genius of great masters. It is the more naive, universal creativity of unspoilt children. Maslow (1970) asserts that the kind of genius displayed by Mozart is present at birth and is not based on psychological well-being or basic need gratification. Mozart may, in fact, not have been a self-actualising person, despite his talent. The kind of creativity that Maslow links with self-actualisation is the ability *to look at life like a child*, in a fresh, naive and direct way, without inhibition. The attitude is more important than the product, and therefore a cobbler may be as creative, in this sense, as the poet. The ability to see more deeply and accurately and to act more spontaneously, naturally and humanely – two characteristics that have been mentioned before – are here specifically linked with creativity.

11.7.15 Resistance against enculturation

Self-actualisers abide by their *own rules* rather than those of the community. And yet they do not blatantly rebel against regulations of unimportant matters, such as dress, language and habits. They resist convention when it is really important to them, but are opposed to ineffective, useless rebellion. They would rather operate from within the system to bring about social reform than launch attacks from the outside.

Although self-actualisers therefore live in relative harmony with the community, they also detach themselves from it in a certain sense by functioning autonomously and not conforming. Maslow says, however, that they are not totally free of the influence of the imperfect community in which they live. They seem perhaps to conform, but within themselves they treasure their own personal secrets, and this does limit their spontaneity and the realisation of their potential.

Far from concluding that the self-actualiser is a perfect person, his study of self-actualisers, in fact, convinced Maslow that there is no such thing as a perfect human being. Even they have silly, meaningless habits and can be boring, obstinate, selfish and irritating. They are not free of superficial vanity, pride or favouritism. They are as subject to outbursts of anger as anyone, and they experience feelings of anxiety, guilt and conflict as anyone may. Because of their strong personalities, they sometimes act mercilessly, with a clinical coldness that shocks, insults or hurts others. However, because of their good-naturedness and pity, people with problems will appeal to them for support.

Although Maslow emphasises the positive aspects of human nature and the possibility of attaining a greater degree of psychological health, he constantly warns that nurturing unrealistic expectations may result in disillusionment (Maslow, 1971).

Self-evaluation questions

- Which characteristics does Maslow ascribe to self-actualisers?
- Do you know a person or people who could be described as self-actualisers?
- Do you possess any characteristics of the self-actualiser?

11.8 Views on psychopathology

What are Maslow's views on psychopathology?

Maslow prefers to speak of *human limitation* rather than neurosis. This refers to the fact that someone who has not actualised his or her potential and possibilities is seen to be functioning on a limited level. This limitation manifests itself in various forms and degrees.

Enrichment

The specific nature of the self-actualisation tendency seems to play an important role in the emergence of psychopathology. Whereas the instincts of animals are strong and overwhelming, this inner, natural growth tendency in man is weak, delicate, subtle and good. Because the self-actualising tendency is so fragile, it is easily blocked and suppressed by environmental influences and people's habits and negative attitudes. In view of this, Maslow (cited in Möller, 1995:210) had the following to say about psychopathology:

What is bad or abnormal? Anything that frustrates or blocks or denies the essential nature of man. What is psychopathological? Anything that disturbs or frustrates or twists the course of self-actualization.

11.8.1 Need gratification and pathology

Maslow's theory makes it clear that he places a high priority on the *gratification of basic needs* and that the failure of the environment to provide for these needs is important for the level of development the individual achieves. A person whose need for love, for example, is *not fulfilled* can become so obsessed with love that he or she can become pathologically dependent. In fact, it is virtually impossible for someone to achieve the level of self-actualisation unless all the lower level needs are being consistently fulfilled. Maslow (1970) points out that the meaning the individual gives to the fulfilment of his or her needs also has a bearing on malfunctioning. For example, unfulfilled sexual needs will reach a pathological level only in a person to whom these needs represent rejection by the opposite sex, inferiority, worthlessness, a lack of respect and isolation.

Maslow (1970) also points out that the *over-gratification* of needs can lead to new forms of pathology. For example, he says that children whose basic needs are fulfilled to excess, who lack no material advantages and who are used to being the centre of attention, no longer appreciate the gratification of lower level needs. According to Maslow, parents should set boundaries for their children, and should treat them with firmness, strictness and discipline, as well as caring and concern.

In addition to the negative influences of unfulfilled and over-gratified basic needs, there are also the effects of unfulfilled and over-gratified higher values. Even on the level of self-actualisation, there is the danger that unfulfilled meta-needs can lead to pathological conditions, which Maslow (1971:317) calls *meta-pathologies*. He does not say much about these pathological conditions and his conclusions are rather tentative. He mentions only a few general examples – a lack of meaning, an inability to experience enjoyment, an existential vacuum and a feeling of worthlessness. Although these ideas are in accord with Frankl's theory, Maslow does not explore them in enough detail to allow any definite conclusions.

The over-gratification of meta-needs could conceivably lead to boredom. Someone who is exposed to 'too much' beauty may become blasé. Some people become so used to their good fortune that they have to experience deprivation, frustration, threats, perhaps even tragedy, before they can appreciate their blessings once more.

Self-evaluation question

- Is it true that Maslow gives attention to non-gratification as well as to over-gratification of needs in his views on psychopathology? Explain.

11.9 Implications and applications

How can Maslow's theory be applied to everyday contexts?

Maslow's theory has many implications and applications. The idea that deficiency needs must be gratified, but that opportunities should also be created for the fulfilment of growth motives has implications for *industry*, *education* and *psychotherapy*.

11.9.1 Industry

Maslow's theory had a profound impact on industry, which continues to apply many of his principles. He advocated the implementation of what he called *Eupsychian* working conditions. This means that not only must the basic needs such as the need for food, protection and clothes be fulfilled, but a person's higher values, such as his or her striving toward self-actualisation, should also be recognised.

The wherewithal for satisfying lower level needs can be bought, but after that people are motivated by higher needs, such as the need for affiliation, affection, dignity and respect, as well as the opportunity for self-actualisation and higher values, such as truth, beauty and efficiency, excellence, justice, protection, order and legality.

Erasmus and Schenk (2008) include Maslow's theory in a comparison with other theories to point out certain managerial implications in the South African context.

11.9.2 Education

For Maslow, *education* should not merely aim at conveying knowledge; it should also involve 'internal education'. This is a process through which individuals get to know themselves and develop a set of values; they begin to discover their potential, to find out how they wish to grow, and to achieve these goals. The teacher's major goal is to produce self-actualising and self-transcending people. According to Maslow (1971), the main objective of education should be for children to discover themselves and through this process of discovery come to realise what their particular interests are. If the learning takes place in a stress-free environment, this will enable them to focus on what they need and not the wishes of other people.

Maslow agrees with Rogers in this respect, that the ideal would be to do away with fixed syllabi and the system of obtaining credits or marks. What is far more important is to discover good potential and to build upon it.

The teacher should teach the child that life is precious, and should awaken in him or her an awareness of its beauty and wonder. The teacher should allow the child to experience a sense of achievement, so that learning can be a peak experience for him or her. The child must be able to stare in wonderment, experience the mystery or taste fulfilment just like the great historians, scientists and musicians.

Maslow (1971:178) would place art, music and dance or movement at the centre of the curriculum where they would serve as models for other subjects. When a child is taught to appreciate art and music, he or she may perhaps learn to appreciate the beauty and meaning of a subject such as mathematics.

If we accept that the fulfilment of meta-needs is just as important as the fulfilment of deficiency needs – that it is just as important to try to fulfil the need for truth, goodness, faithfulness and beauty as it is to supplement a vitamin deficiency – then self-actualisation should also receive attention in education.

Self-evaluation question

- What are the implications of Maslow's theory for industry and education?

11.9.3 Psychotherapy

It is important to remember that Maslow did not practise as a therapist himself. Therefore, he did not propose a unique therapeutic approach or specific therapeutic techniques. He did, however, comment on the atmosphere that should be created in the *therapeutic context* and on the role played by the therapist in this process. According to Maslow (1970), it is important that the therapist acts as facilitator in creating a therapeutic relationship in which the clients' basic needs for security, love and regard will be met so that they can discover and realise their true potential.

According to Maslow (1971:51–53), the task of the therapist is not that of a doctor trying to cure a sick person, or that of a teacher trying to help someone from a position of superior knowledge. Maslow prefers to think of the therapist as the facilitator of a growth process. The therapist should play the part of a wise and loving older brother, who shows respect for his younger brother's innate character and wants to help him break down his defences so that he can rediscover himself and realise his potential. According to Maslow, successful therapy can also be applied in a group situation.

Enrichment

Maslow (1970) makes a distinction between *basic need therapy* and *insight therapy*. *Basic need therapy* is aimed at meeting the basic needs for security, affiliation, love and respect in the relatively healthy person. The appropriate relationship for need therapy is similar to any good, healthy relationship, for example, those encountered in couples, between parent and child and between friends. Basic need therapy can therefore occur within the context of everyday relationships.

(continued)

Insight therapy, however, concerns more deep-seated problems and requires specific input from the therapist. Clients who need insight therapy are people whose basic needs have been left unsatisfied to such an extent that they no longer believe that the environment can or will meet their needs – that they are, consequently, too worthless to be cared about or loved. The person is therefore caught up in low-level needs that cannot be satisfied through need therapy. This type of person must be helped to gain insight into their shortcomings and guided toward the rediscovery of their worth and potential within a professional therapeutic relationship. They must therefore be put back on the road to self-actualisation (De Vos, in Möller, 1995).

Self-evaluation question

- What is the essence of Maslow's contribution to psychotherapy?

11.9.4 Religion

Maslow's holistic approach has certain implications for the *practice of religion*. The holistic approach stresses *integrated* as opposed to *dichotomous* thought and Maslow warns against supporting extreme poles in religion. One extreme is the over-emphasis of dogma, clinging to rites and organisation. Another is the exaltation of the mystical and the charismatic. In both cases the truly deep spiritual experiences can be lost.

Although Maslow does not regard orthodox rites and religious practices as signifying self-actualised functioning, he does acknowledge that for some people religious life is so deeply and authentically experienced that it must be placed on the level of self-actualisation.

Self-evaluation question

- According to Maslow, what kind of religion signifies self-actualised functioning?

11.9.5 Measurement and research

As a humanist, Maslow maintains that the *focus of research* should be *human experiences*. He regards traditional, mechanistic scientific research techniques as too limited to investigate human reality.

For him, the key issue in psychological research is to study human experience as a whole, and not rendered down elements of it. He does, however, caution against an approach that elevates the mystical to such an extent that no useful knowledge can flow from it. He does not advocate dispensing with behaviourist research methods altogether, but proposes an integration between abstract, objective organisation and experience.

When experience is being examined, it is assumed that the researchers will become part of the experience, and according to Maslow, this fusion is promoted when

the researcher cares. ‘Do you want to know? Then care!’ (Maslow, 1966:104). Researchers should, moreover, be so open to the experience that they can submit to an independent kind of listening in which their own values and evaluations do not intrude.

In accordance with Maslow’s emphasis upon *holism* and *subjective experience*, the evaluation and research methods he promoted are especially suited to the study of basic problems that involve the whole individual. Maslow (1970:11) states:

Inevitable stress on elegance, polish, technique, and apparatus has as a frequent consequence a playing down of meaningfulness, vitality, and significance of the problem and of creativeness in general.

In his research with self-actualisers, Maslow used the technique of *iteration* whereby information was refined through different processes until the required results were achieved. For instance, he acquired as much information as possible about his subjects through interviews and biographies, and the characteristics he identified by these means were then reprocessed and verified in the light of further data about these people.

Maslow’s theory led to the use of certain subjective methods of evaluation and also to the compilation of a questionnaire, the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), which Shostrom (1964) developed to measure a person’s degree of self-actualising in a valid and reliable manner. The questionnaire consists of 150 alternatives. The subject chooses between two alternatives as in the following examples (cited in Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981:386):

- (a) I live by the standards and rules of society.
- (b) I do not always need to live by the rules and standards of society.

- (a) It is better to be yourself.
- (b) It is better to be popular.

It should, however, be noted that Weiss (1987) challenged the validity of the POI and Cilliers, Koortzen and De Beer (2004) suggested that the POI should be interpreted with care in South Africa’s multicultural scenario. (Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232348490_Shostrom's_personal_orientation_inventory_Arguments_against_its_basic_validity)

Allen (1994) refers to a 70-item scale (the Peak Scale) drawn up by Mathes, Zevon, Roter and Joerger in 1982, which measures the propensity for peak experiences. These researchers found that people who achieved high scores on the scale experienced transcendent and mystical experiences, as well as feelings of intense happiness. They also reported that their lives were guided by B-values such as truth, beauty and justice. Women with high scores in terms of peak experiences were inclined to achieve higher self-actualisation scores on the POI compared with women who did not report peak experiences.

As regards the hierarchy of needs, most research concentrates on the hierarchy as a whole or on self-actualisation. Williams and Page (Allen, 1994) filled a gap with their research in 1989 when they gave specific attention to the measurement of safety needs, needs for affiliation and love and the need for self-esteem. One of their hypotheses was that the extent to which a need had been satisfied should correlate negatively with the importance given to the need by the person concerned, and that the person's self-concept would be bound up with the level of needs to which the person was attending at that time. If, for example, a person was somewhat dissatisfied about his or her self-esteem but had satisfied all the lower needs, the highest self-concept score would be on the self-esteem level. It could then be accepted that the person was attending to self-esteem needs and was unlikely to move rapidly to the level of self-actualisation. These researchers used undergraduate students as their subjects, and reported success with establishing the level of needs on which the research subjects were functioning and which needs they would want to satisfy next (Allen, 1994:258–259).

Enrichment

Examples of South African research with links to Maslow's theory:

1. Cilliers, F, Koortzen, P and De Beer, M (2004). *Confirmatory factor analysis on the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI)*. South African Journal of Labour Relations, 28(2): 33–58.
2. Mokoka, E, Oosthuizen, MJ and Ehlers, VJ (2010). *Retaining Professional Nurses in South Africa*. Health SA Gesondheid, 15(1), 9 pages (Retrieved from: <http://www.hsag.co.za/index.php/hsag/article/view/484>)
3. At an ECD (Education and Care in Childhood and Development) Knowledge Building Seminar (2014), Prof Jace Pillay from the University of Johannesburg delivered a paper: *Special concerns about ECD of orphans and vulnerable children*. He quotes Maslow's and Erikson's theories but cautions against applications of these theories in an African context. (Retrieved from: www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAF_resources_ecdkb2014s_jacepillay.pdf)

Self-evaluation question

- What contributions did Maslow's ideas make in the field of research?

11.9.6 The interpretation and handling of aggression

Maslow most certainly acknowledges the existence of a *destructive* side to human beings. It was, in fact, his witnessing of cruelty and violence in war that prompted him to investigate and emphasise the human potential for constructive growth. Maslow does not, however, pay explicit attention to aggression, and the following interpretations are no more than conclusions that can be drawn from his theory.

Maslow would probably have proceeded from the stance that people can use violence or aggressive behaviour to satisfy needs at any level of the hierarchy.

A person who is involved in a struggle for biological survival might, for example, behave violently in order to obtain food. Jordaan (cited in Muller and Vos, 1994) points out that someone who experiences a lack of safety and security could engage in mindless violence in a genuine attempt to gain a feeling of control in conditions of misery and insecurity. Someone for whom the needs for affiliation and love are of the utmost importance could, perhaps, succumb to violence if these needs were frustrated. Just think of all the murders committed when a love triangle is discovered. When self-esteem needs become important, and a person's status, competence or self-confidence is threatened in some way, violence may be used in a desperate attempt to recover the lost esteem.

Aggressive, violent behaviour signifies a lack of the self-discipline that Maslow (1959) maintains is present in the ordinary, average person. Self-actualisers do, of course, display self-discipline and are motivated by needs such as the needs for truth, justice, meaning, beauty and order. Can we therefore assume that self-actualisers are not aggressive or violent? Apparently even they are not exempt from aggressive behaviour. Self-actualisers can sometimes seem distant and hostile, and there are also those who, in their pursuit of an ideal or in the service of some great cause, may resort to aggression. Maslow (1959) said that although anyone had the potential to become a good and healthy man, very few actually did, and that self-knowledge was the key to self-improvement.

According to Maslow, the path to self-knowledge and self-acceptance is a difficult one for most people. It takes courage and often involves a lengthy struggle. Skilled therapists can help to ease the process, but therapeutic processes can also be applied in teaching and family contexts. Of course, an environment that permits the satisfaction of basic needs plays an important role in curbing violence. Maslow reminds us, however, that while the environment can play a facilitating role, we are ultimately responsible for discovering and realising our own potential and for turning away from the destructive potential towards discovering and broadening the constructive potential.

Man is ultimately not molded or shaped into human-ness or taught to be human. The role of the environment is ultimately to permit him or help him to actualize his own potentialities, not its potentialities (Maslow, 1959:130).

Self-evaluation question

- What can Maslow's theory teach us about the possible curbing of aggression?

Activity

Having acquainted yourself with Maslow's theory, apply Maslow's theory to the development of disadvantaged members of society. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using Maslow's theory as a model for the development of disadvantaged members of society?

11.10 Evaluation of the theory

What contribution does Maslow's theory make to psychology?

Maslow writes with the authority and simplicity of someone who has thought deeply about his ideas. He is down to earth, but there is an earnestness in his message. There is, too, the humour of one who finds joy in ordinary things. The following extracts convey some of the flavour of his writing (Maslow, 1971):

The B-values are not separate piles of sticks, but rather the different facets of one jewel (194).

Facts don't lie there like pancakes, just doing nothing; they are to a certain extent signposts which tell you what to do (27).

I remember a textbook of abnormal psychology that I used when I was an undergraduate, which was an awful book, but which had a wonderful frontispiece. The lower half was a picture of a line of babies, pink, sweet, delightful, innocent, lovable. Above that was a picture of a lot of passengers in a subway train, glum, gray, sullen, sour. The caption underneath was simply, 'What happened?' (26).

Maslow's theory was highly popular to begin with, because it spoke to ordinary people who could identify with it. It does appear, however, that the theory of needs is too limited to contain all Maslow's ideas. For example, his ideas on values, relationships and creativity are not easily contained within the framework of a hierarchy of needs. It is as if Maslow outgrew his own theory and one has to take a far wider view of his initial thinking to really appreciate the value of his ideas. In his efforts to stress people's innate goodness he tends to under-emphasise, and even deny, people's negative aspects. Although he is honest enough to admit that characteristics such as selfishness and rage are apparent even in the self-actualiser, one wonders whether he is realistic in laying all the blame on the environment. Like Jung, he does refer to the ideal state in which there would be a balance between positive and negative, but it is not clear how these ideas fit in with the hierarchy of needs and the postulation that people are basically good.

The hierarchy of needs, which Maslow suggests, can at the most be regarded as tentative. For example, it does not provide for the martyr who is prepared to die for a cause, or for the artist who lives in poverty. Maslow does concede that there are exceptions where the person regards the meta-needs as so valuable that they dominate the lower needs. He also points out that it is sometimes necessary to experience deprivation and even pain in order for the fulfilment of basic needs to regain its value. Strictly speaking, his theory does not make any provision for these ideas and he does not provide explanations for the exceptions that he refers to. The significance of Maslow's theory lies in its presentation of the person as a totality in which the biological and psychological and also the role of past, present and future expectations are included. The environment is not the mere manipulator of behaviour, it also provides the opportunities and space in which self-actualisation can take place (Du Toit, 1986:213).

In emphasising transcendent experiences and intrinsic values such as truth, goodness, beauty, perfection, simplicity and elegance, Maslow gives recognition to a higher, trans-human dimension or spiritual level of functioning (Maslow, 1964; 1968; 1972). This is why later formulations of the hierarchy include eight levels rather than the original five and include the following on the higher levels: Cognitive needs – knowledge, curiosity, understanding, self-awareness; Aesthetic needs – beauty, sensory stimulation balance; and Transcendence needs – helping others to achieve self-actualisation, spiritual and global concerns. (Retrieved from: <https://careersintheory.wordpress.com/2010/01/20/classics-maslows-hierarchy-of-needs/>)

11.10.1 Recent research and views on Maslow's theory

A research team (Kenrick *et al.*, 2010) suggested the restructuring of the famous needs hierarchy or pyramid and replaced the need for Self-Actualisation with what they call 'evolutionary fundamental motives' such as Self-Protection, Mate Acquisition, Mate Retention and Parenting. They also emphasise that needs overlap and co-exist.

The new renovated pyramid has generated some controversy in the field, which Kenrick (2010) believes will 'help us get it right'.

Other views stress the idea that Maslow's hierarchy of needs is not universal and may vary due to the availability of resources and across individual and collective societies (Cianci and Gambrel, 2003). Different needs may also be linked to different types of well-being (Tay and Diener, 2011) and may vary during peace and wartime (Tang, Ibrahim and West, 2002).

Despite the criticisms it is interesting to note that Maslow's theory (or renovated versions of it) still has relevance in many contexts today and that the theory is still generating research, as is clear from the following example:

On 6 May 2015 Natalie Estman, a Masters student in Psychology at the University of Liverpool, invited South African adults to participate in a study that seeks to examine whether socio-economic variables are correlated with Abraham Maslow's needs levels. (Retrieved from: www.news24.com/Mynews24/Looking-for-South-Africans-20150506)

11.11 Suggested reading

Maslow, AH (1967). A theory of meta-motivation: The biological rooting of value-life. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 7: 93–127.

Maslow, AH (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. Princeton: Van Nostrand.

Maslow, AH (1970). *Motivation and personality*. (2nd ed.) New York: Harper.

Maslow, AH (1971). *The farther reaches of human nature*. New York: The Viking Press.

The following website (Last updated 6 August 2015) provides a good overview of Maslow's theory and points to recent criticisms and additions to the theory:

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs



Chapter 12

The self-concept theory of Carl Rogers (1902–1987)

Cora Moore

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12.1 Outcomes

- Understand the humanistic–phenomenological nature of Rogers’ theory and the view of the person underlying the theory.
- Know how Rogers’ own life experiences influenced his theory.
- Comprehend the important role Rogers ascribes to the self-concept in human functioning.
- Understand how the development of the personality can be enhanced or hampered by unconditional or conditional positive regard.
- Clearly distinguish between Rogers’ views on optimal and pathological functioning.
- Understand what the practical implications and applications of Rogers’ theory are for various contexts.
- Critically evaluate Rogers’ theory.

12.2 Background

With which school of thought can Carl Rogers’ theory be associated?

KEY TERM

humanistic–phenomenological orientation: places a high premium on the freedom and constructiveness of human nature and emphasises the person’s role as the architect of his or her life

Carl Rogers ranks himself with the **humanistic–phenomenological** school of thought. His personality theory is based on three central assumptions. These are that the individual has *constructive potential*; that the nature of the individual is basically *goal-directed* and that the individual is *capable of changing*. Rogers also emphasises the importance of people’s subjective experience of themselves (their *self-concepts*) and its influence on personality.

Rogers sees the individual person as the central figure in the actualisation of his own potential, with the environment playing a facilitating or inhibiting role. Potential is actualised, or realised, in an atmosphere in which the individual is unconditionally accepted for what he or she is and feels free to develop without external restrictions.



Carl Rogers
Source: Corbis. Gallo Images

How did Rogers’ own life experiences influence his theory?

Rogers’ theory originated mainly from his experience with people in a *clinical therapeutic situation*, but his *personal life experiences*, especially during his childhood years, also possibly influenced his thinking.

Carl Ransom Rogers was born on 8 January 1902 in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago (Retrieved from https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Rogers#Biography). He was exposed to scientific thinking at an early age. His father, an engineer, used scientific principles on the farm on which they lived – for example, he applied the concepts of control groups and hypothesis testing to the feeding patterns of cows.

Farm life stimulated other widely divergent interests. When he was only 12 years old, Rogers conducted an intensive study of the night-flying moth

and rapidly became regarded as a specialist on the subject. With that in mind, it is small wonder that in his vision of the fully-functioning person, he places such an emphasis on openness to experience and the ability to derive pleasure from small things.

Rogers came from an extremely narrow-minded, conservative home. The family had little social contact with others – because, as Rogers has said, they were forbidden contact with ‘sinful’ things such as card games, films, smoking and alcohol. This led the young Carl to immerse himself in books, so widening his intellectual horizons and enriching his knowledge but also plunging him into an isolation, which hampered his development in the area of human relationships. His theory, therefore, possibly as a consequence of his own deprivation, argues for ‘wholeness’ and the development of all potential. Later in life he concentrated on developing human relationships and, in his own growth as a person, focused particularly on that area where he had experienced an emptiness in himself.

The almost rebellious resistance displayed by Rogers towards any enforced prescriptions on the individual from the outside can also be interpreted within the framework of his own experience. In 1924 Rogers began studies at the Union Theological Seminary, a liberal theological institution in New York. There, individual thinking was encouraged to such a degree that he found it impossible to stick to specific doctrines. He had to find a field of study where his freedom of thought would not be limited or forced in any particular direction. He found this kind of flexibility in the area of psychology and began attending lectures at the Teachers’ College at the University of Columbia. He served an internship at the Institute of Child Guidance in 1927 and 1928 and received a PhD in clinical psychology in 1931.

On completion of his doctorate, he accepted a post as a psychologist at the Child Study Department of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Rochester, New York. The salary was meagre but he felt that it was an opportunity to do something that really interested him. He was also closely associated with the establishment of the new Guidance Centre in Rochester and was appointed its director despite the fact that the position had been reserved for a psychiatrist.

It is clear from Rogers’ writings that he was often at the centre of controversy. He propagated the humanist approach, which differed dramatically from the psychoanalytical and behaviourist schools of thought, for example, and in the clash between the psychiatric and clinical psychology approaches, he ranged himself on the side of the clinical psychologists. Rogers’ (1978) policy was consistently to walk gently through life and to make as little noise as possible until he had reached his goal and it was too late to stop him – a policy that seems to have been most successful!

In the years after 1940 Rogers was attached to the Ohio State, Chicago and Wisconsin universities. In 1964 he left academia and joined the Western Behavioural Sciences Institute (WBSI) in La Jolla, California. In 1968 he moved to the Centre for Studies of the Person, also in La Jolla, where he worked right up to his death at the age of 85 in 1987.

Rogers believed that his theory, which took root in the clinical context, did not necessarily equip him to grasp the international arena. Accordingly, during the last 15 years of his life, he became involved in international conflict situations as a ‘socio-therapist’. By doing so, he attempted to build a broad, productive experiential base in the international arena. He worked in Northern Ireland, Italy, Poland, Brazil, Japan, Mexico, France, the Philippines, Hungary, South Africa, Spain, America and Russia (Solomon, 1990). Commenting on one of his workshops in Central America, Rogers had the following to say (Rogers, 1986): ‘... it reached a point where individuals listened to one another, actually HEARD one another, and began to build strong personal bonds where only suspicion and mistrust had existed before.’

Carl Rogers received dozens of awards in his professional capacity. He is, for example, the only person to have received both the ‘Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award’ and the ‘Distinguished Professional Contribution Award’ of the American Psychological Association (Jankowitz, 1982).

Rogers clearly lived what he taught. He enjoyed 55 years of happy marriage to his wife, Helen, and at the end of his life was able to refer to his children as his best friends. Right up to the end, he saw himself as ‘older and growing’ rather than as ‘growing older’! (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990a:37).

Did Carl Rogers visit South Africa and did his ideas impact on South African society?

Rogers visited South Africa in 1982 and conducted workshops in Johannesburg and Cape Town. In 1986 he was invited to return, this time to facilitate black/white groups and use his person-centred orientation to investigate issues causing tensions among different population groups. The 40 people who participated in the groups were trained to act as facilitators for other groups.

The Association for the Person-Centred Approach in South Africa hosted the seventh International PCA (Person-Centred Approach) in Johannesburg in 1998. The forum was attended by delegates from all over the world.

In the fourth edition of their book: *Person-Centred Facilitation*, Grobler, Schenk and Mbedzi (2013) provide a wealth of South African case studies. Values from an African cultural perspective, such as *ubuntu*, are integrated and social justice is emphasised as an important element of the developmental counselling process.

12.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

What were Carl Rogers' basic beliefs about human beings?

Rogers' fundamental view of the person is *humanistic-phenomenological*. In terms of the *humanistic approach*, he emphasises the study of the individual as a whole and the active role that each person plays in actualising his or her own inherent potential. In this regard Rogers says:

In my experience I have discovered man to have characteristics which seem inherent in his species, and the terms which have at different times seemed to me descriptive of these characteristics are such terms as positive, forward-moving, constructive, realistic, trustworthy. (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990a:403)

Individuals are therefore not just active role players in their own functioning: they can also be trusted to follow a positive course in order to realise their potential and to become the best that they can be. Rogers does not go into detail about just what this potential is. Although he believes that humans possess basically constructive attributes, he does acknowledge the existence of destructive tendencies such as aggression (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990b). He maintains, however, that healthy people are aware of their positive and negative attributes, and that the constructive will triumph over the destructive. Consequently, he places a high premium on the *freedom and constructiveness of human nature* and emphasises the person's role as the architect of his or her life. This implies, of course, that his theory is not deterministic, because behaviour is determined by the choices of the individual, and not by factors that lie beyond his or her control.

According to Rogers, the environment plays no more than a facilitating or inhibiting role in the realisation of the individual's potential. If we look more closely at the role he ascribes to the environment, however, particularly the social environment, one wonders whether the human portrayed by Rogers is really so free, and whether there are not, after all, some signs of determinism in his theory.

KEY TERM

self-concept: the 'picture' people have of themselves and the value they attach to themselves

In line with the *phenomenological approach*, Rogers also stresses the part played by people's *subjective experience* of their world, particularly the impact on behaviour of individuals' **self-concept** – in other words, their view of themselves.

For Rogers, the ideal environment is one created by circumstances that allow individuals to see themselves exactly as they are, and in which all their potential can be realised. This ideal is, however, rarely, if ever, encountered, since individuals are not unconditionally accepted by significant others.

What this means is that the environment lays down certain conditions for accepting the individual. This influences individuals' self-concept, and they then act, not in accordance with their potential, but in accordance with the conditions set by significant others.

The ideal that Rogers presents to us thus appears to endow the individual with freedom, but in practice it seems that most people are actually influenced by factors that lie outside themselves. However, Rogers emphasises the individual's *freedom to change*, thereby introducing the possibility that those who function in terms of the conditions of others can become free and can then realise their potential. But the prerequisite here is that they must experience *unconditional acceptance*, either in a therapeutic situation or in their everyday lives.

Are there certain basic theoretical assumptions that underlie Rogers' theory?

In most of Rogers' works, the emphasis falls on psychotherapy and the helping role of the therapist. Naturally enough, his personality theory is derived from his practical experience in the field of psychotherapy. Incidentally, Rogers occasionally expressed surprise at the notion that he might actually have created a personality theory, but there are nevertheless 19 *propositions* in existence, in which he set out certain assumptions that are fundamental to his approach. The essence of the 19 propositions is captured in the Enrichment section that follows.

Enrichment

The essence of the 19 propositions underlying Rogers' theory:

1. The individual forms the centre of the continually changing world of experience in which he or she exists.
2. The individual's 'reality' is made up of his or her perceptions of the field of experience and the way the organism reacts is determined by these experiences and perceptions.
3. The individual reacts as an organised whole to this field of experience, also known as the phenomenal field.
4. The self is a portion of the total perceptual field that gradually differentiates.
5. The structure of the self develops as a result of interaction with the environment and particularly as a result of evaluative interaction with others. The self construct is consistent and yet is fluid or changeable. It pertains to a conceptual pattern of perceptions related to characteristics and relationships of the 'I' or 'me', as well as the values attached to these concepts.
6. The basic tendency and striving of the organism or individual is to enhance, actualise and maintain the experiencing organism.
7. The individual can be best understood when viewed from his or her internal frame of reference.
8. Behaviour can be regarded as the organism's goal-directed attempt to satisfy its needs according to the way the field is experienced and perceived.
9. Emotions accompany and can facilitate behaviour. The kind of emotion is linked to the importance of the behaviour for the maintenance and enhancement of the organism.
10. The values attached to experiences and the values that form part of the self can be values directly experienced by the individual or they can be values taken over from others, but perceived in a distorted way, as if experienced directly by the individual.

11. Experiences are dealt with by the individual in the following ways: They are (i) symbolised – perceived and organised into some relationship to the self (ii) ignored – as no relationship to the self is perceived (iii) denied or symbolised in a distorted manner – because the experience is inconsistent or incongruent with the self structure.
12. Most ways implemented by the individual are those that are in line with the self concept.
13. Organic experiences and needs may lead to behaviour that is inconsistent with the self structure. In such instances the behaviour is not ‘owned’ by the individual.
14. Psychological adjustment is deemed to exist when all sensory and visceral experiences are or may be assimilated into a consistent relationship with the self concept.
15. Psychological maladjustment exists when significant sensory or visceral experiences are denied symbolisation and are not included in the whole or Gestalt of the self concept. This can result in psychological tension.
16. Experiences that are inconsistent with the self structure may be perceived as a threat. The more of these threats exist the more rigidly the self structure will be organised to maintain itself.
17. In instances where no threats are experienced to the self structure, experiences that are inconsistent with the self concept may be perceived and examined and the self structure may be revised to assimilate or include such experiences.
18. In cases where an individual is able to allow all his or her sensory and visceral experiences into a consistent and integrated self structure, he or she will also be more understanding and accepting of others as separate individuals.
19. As individuals are able to accept more of their organic experiences into their self structure, they can replace their previous value system and distorted perceptions – which were based on the introjected values of others – with their own value system.

The first five propositions concern the structure of the theory. In Rogers’ theory, the person occupies the central position, which is why the individual, to whom Rogers also refers as the organism, is the central structural element. The salient issue here is the organism, which interacts with its ‘total experiential world’ or *phenomenal field*. The part of the phenomenal field that is bound up with the experience of the self is known as the *self-concept* and it forms an important part of the structure of the personality.

To avoid confusion, it should be noted that Rogers uses the terms ‘individual’ and ‘organism’ synonymously to refer to the person and that the terms ‘self’, ‘self-structure’ and ‘self-concept’ all refer to the person’s perception of himself or herself.

Self-evaluation questions

- With which school of thought does Carl Rogers identify himself? Explain why his theory belongs within this framework.
- What influence did Carl Rogers’ personal life experiences have on his theory?

12.4 The structure of the personality

How does Rogers define the structure of the personality? Put differently, according to Rogers, which ‘parts’ does the personality consist of?

Rogers distinguishes three structural elements, namely *the organism*, *the phenomenal field* and *the self-concept*. An explanation of these three structural elements and their interrelationships follows.

12.4.1 The organism

KEY TERM

organism: the total individual with all his or her physical and psychological functions

The **organism**, that is, the total individual with all physical and psychological functions, is the central figure who interacts constantly with the dynamically changing world in which he or she lives. Each organism’s behaviour is determined by the specific subjective perception of this world and the meanings the individual attaches to this.

12.4.2 The phenomenal field

The *phenomenal field* represents the totality of a person’s perceptions and experiences, and includes the following:

- perceptions of *objects or events outside the person*, and the meanings attached to them
- *inner experiences* and meanings that relate to the person himself or herself.

12.4.3 The self-concept

The differentiated part of the phenomenal field that concerns the person himself or herself is known as the *self-concept*. Rogers (1959) defined the self-concept as a specific entity of a self that is composed of self-perception as well as perceptions of relationships with others and combined with values that are attached to these perceptions.

The *self-concept* thus refers to the ‘picture’ that individuals have of themselves and the value they attach to themselves (how I see myself, what my characteristics are, how I judge myself in the areas of appearance, ability, talents, motives, goals, ideals and social interactions and relationships).

Rogers does not present the self-concept as ‘a little man in the head’ who controls a person’s behaviour; he sees it rather as representing the person’s conscious experience of himself or herself. Only conscious experiences and experiences that are allowed into consciousness are included in the self-concept.

The personality structure is shown diagrammatically in Figure 12.1.

Although the self-concept consists of a relatively stable pattern of integrated perceptions, it is nevertheless flexible and changeable. Because self-perceptions are organised into a whole, change in one part of the self-concept influences the whole of the self-image. People who, for example, believe themselves to be cold and loveless because they cannot show affection might dislodge this view by becoming aware that they are able to be loving towards a pet. This discovery of a previously negated part of their functioning can help alter their whole self-concept, that is, their total experience of themselves. The **ideal self** is the self-concept the individual would most like to have (Rogers, 1961:200). In a psychologically healthy person the ideal self is more or less realistic, attainable and in harmony with the self-concept. In this case, therefore, the ideal self provides valuable guidelines for growth and development because it reveals the characteristics and ideals that the individual strives towards.

KEY TERM

ideal self: the view of the self that the individual would most like to have

In a psychologically unhealthy person, the self-concept and the ideal self do not correspond. Here, the ideal self apparently represents extreme forms of the ideals set by others for the person, and it is not in tune with the real potential of the individual. The assumption is that successful therapy will allow the self-concept and the ideal self to draw closer together (Krause, 1964:70).

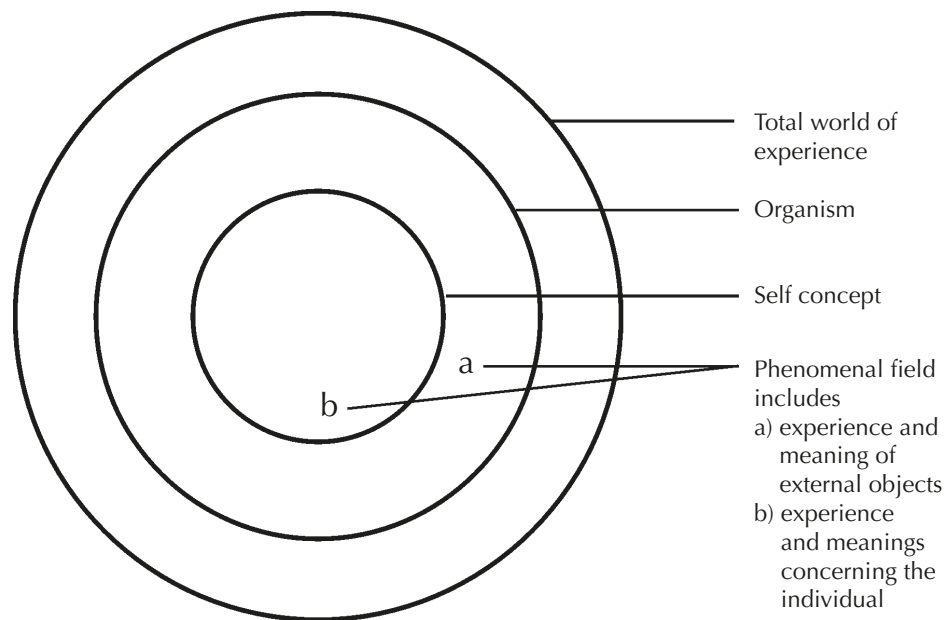


Figure 12.1 A diagram representing the structural elements according to Rogers' theory
Source: Moore (2016)

Self-evaluation question

- How does Rogers define the self-concept?

12.5 The dynamics of the personality

How does Rogers explain the dynamics of the personality? Put differently, what is the driving or motivating force behind behaviour and how do the different parts of the personality ‘work together’ to determine the person’s functioning?

KEY TERM

actualising tendency:

an inherent tendency of organisms to maintain themselves and to expand or grow in order to become what they can be

Note that propositions 6 to 13 in the Enrichment section concern the *dynamics of the personality*. In Rogers’ theory when we ask questions about the dynamics of the personality to find out what motivates the individual and how he or she functions, we must first focus on the basic motive that underlies all behaviour: the **actualising tendency**. In addition, there are two other basic needs underlying and directing behaviour, namely the *need for positive regard* and the *need for positive self-regard*.

The importance of the self-concept in determining behaviour has already been stressed. Attention must also be given to:

- *Congruent* functioning, that is when the individual’s self-concept corresponds with his or her potential
- *Incongruent* functioning, that is when the individual’s self-concept does not correspond with his or her potential
- *The role that the self-concept plays in perception and experience* and how it affects behaviour.

12.5.1 The actualising tendency

Rogers believes (1961:166) the purpose of all life is to become ‘that self which one truly is’ – a formulation he derived from the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. He proposes that all organisms, even plants, have a natural tendency to strive for utmost development of their potential, regardless of what setbacks might befall them. He cites as an illustration a plant growing against a rock face that keeps on growing despite being repeatedly dislodged by the elements. Humans have the same kind of basic tendency, which Rogers calls the *actualising tendency*. The actualising tendency is an inherent tendency of organisms to maintain themselves and to expand or grow in order to become what they can be (see proposition 6 in the Enrichment section). In human beings, for example, we see this tendency in a baby who is learning to walk, since even though the baby stumbles, he or she does persist and does ultimately learn to walk (Möller, 1993).

It is on this inherent striving for progress and achievement that therapists rely in leading their clients towards discovering their own potential and in helping them to develop that potential as fully as possible.

It is clear that the actualising tendency to which Rogers refers corresponds with the self-actualising tendency which, according to Maslow, motivates all behaviour. It is, however, important to note that Rogers uses the term *actualising*, and not *self-actualising*, when he is referring to the general, basic motive. Rogers does use

KEY TERM

self-actualising: used to refer to the actualisation of the self-concept

the term **self-actualising**, but when he does so he is referring specifically to the actualisation of the self (in the sense of self-concept). Thus, in Rogers' theory, the self-actualising tendency is a subsidiary part of the more general actualising tendency (Krause, 1964:68–69; Maddi, 1980).

You will only grasp the implications of this distinction between actualising and self-actualising once we have explained the concepts *congruence* and *incongruence*. We would like to point out at once, however, that the psychologically healthy or congruent person is someone whose self-concept and actual potential correspond. In such a person, the actualisation of the self-concept (self-actualisation) and the actualisation of the whole organism will be in harmony. In the psychologically unhealthy or incongruent person, the self-concept does not correspond with his or her actual potential. Self-actualisation, which is directed at maintaining the self-concept, is then pursued at the expense of the organism's **actualisation**.

KEY TERM

actualisation: the realisation of potential

Example

A person who sees herself as a 'serious student' and does not allow herself to have any fun, yet deep down yearns to be a madcap as well from time to time, is busy actualising her self-concept. In other words, she is self-actualising at the expense of actualising herself as a whole person.

Self-evaluation questions

- How does Carl Rogers see the goal of all life?
- What basic motive, according to Rogers, underlies all functioning? Explain this concept.

KEY TERMS

need for positive regard from others: concerns the human being's basic need for approval, appreciation, love, admiration and respect

need for positive self-regard: people require esteem from others in order to esteem and feel positive about themselves

12.5.2 The need for positive regard

Apart from the strong need for actualisation, Rogers believes there are two other basic needs underscoring and directing behaviour, namely the **need for positive regard by others** and the **need for positive self-regard**.

- **The need for positive regard from others** concerns the human being's basic need for approval, appreciation, love, admiration and respect. To fill this need, the individual sometimes adopts the wishes and values of another as his or her own and behaves in a particular way to earn esteem. (More will be said about this type of behaviour when incongruent functioning is discussed in 12.5.3.)
- **The need for positive self-regard** is closely associated with the need for positive regard from others; people require that esteem from others in order to esteem and feel positive about themselves. Rogers does not specify whether the need for positive regard is inherent or acquired. The most common view is, however, that it seems to be acquired, but that the origin of the need is not really important. What is important is that the need for positive regard plays an important role in determining individual behaviour (Schultz, 1977).

12.5.3 Congruence and incongruence

Although the *actualising tendency* is acknowledged as being the overriding motive, the *need for positive regard* is also a strong motive and can hinder the actualisation process when the quest for appreciation by others is in conflict with the actualisation of the organism's potential.

Example

A boy who has the talent and desire to become a ballet dancer may end up choosing another career to gain his parents' approval.

KEY TERM

congruence: when the individual's self-concept corresponds with his or her potential

The actualising tendency is directed towards the realisation of all actual potential. It assumes that individuals have the capacity to be aware of all experiences that impinge on them and of all the psychic and physical attributes they possess at any particular time. This capacity is what gives them the ability to know and actualise themselves completely. It follows, therefore, that in the ideal situation there is no difference between people's experiential world and their view of themselves. Rogers calls this state of being **congruence**. 'Congruence' is the ideal in which the individual is open to and conscious of all his or her experiences and can incorporate them into the self-concept. If the boy who wanted to become a ballet dancer were to behave in a congruent manner, he would admit his desire and go ahead to realise his ambition. Congruent people see themselves as they really are and have a self-concept that corresponds with the actual potential. When they behave in a way that maintains and enhances the self-concept it is in harmony with their striving towards the actualisation of organismic potential. The ideal of congruence is seldom, if ever, reached because the environment rarely allows full actualisation. The reasons for this should become clear as we continue our discussion of this theory.

KEY TERMS

organismic experience: the true experiences of the individual; the spontaneous, uncensored immediacy of feelings, needs and awareness

conditions of worth: represent the values of others which the person includes in his or her self-concept

For Rogers it is a sad fact that self-concept is based not only on true individual **organismic experiences** but also on each person's efforts to win approval from others by incorporating their values into his or her own self-concept. The boy who feels rejected by his parents because of his desire to become a ballet dancer might misconstrue their disapproval and incorporate it into his own value system as follows: 'I regard ballet dancers as unmasculine and therefore dancing is an unacceptable career.' Rogers calls a value taken over from others in this way a **condition of worth**. The parents have laid down a condition for accepting their son that he includes in his self-concept in order to retain their love and acceptance while simultaneously satisfying his own basic need for positive regard. At heart, however, he continues to wish for a career as a ballet dancer and to admire male ballet dancers such as Baryshnikov.

When a person has an experience (such as admiration for a ballet dancer) that is at odds with the self-concept, he or she cannot incorporate that experience into the self-concept. His or her total experiential world includes both admissible and inadmissible experiences: experiences allowed into consciousness and therefore incorporated into the self-concept, and experiences not permitted into consciousness.

KEY TERM

incongruence: when the individual's self-concept does not correspond with his or her potential

There is **incongruence** when experiences contrary to the self-concept form part of the phenomenal field. Individuals can exclude incongruent experiences from their consciousness by *denying* them, or they might *distort* the experiences to make them fit the self-concept. Let us return to our example of the boy who wants to become a ballet dancer. He might block this desire from entering his consciousness by telling himself that in South Africa there are actually very few career opportunities for ballet dancers. In this way he retains his self-concept as a masculine boy of whom his parents can be proud.

Congruence and incongruence can be shown diagrammatically as in Figures 12.2 and 12.3.

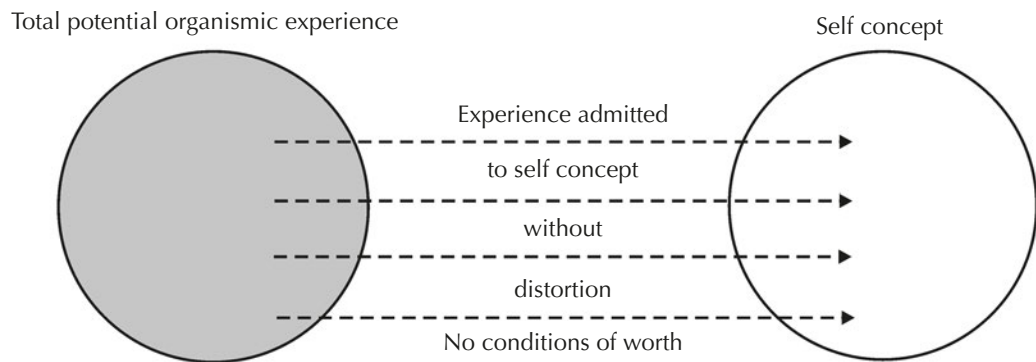


Figure 12.2 A diagram representing a state of congruity
Source: Moore (2016)

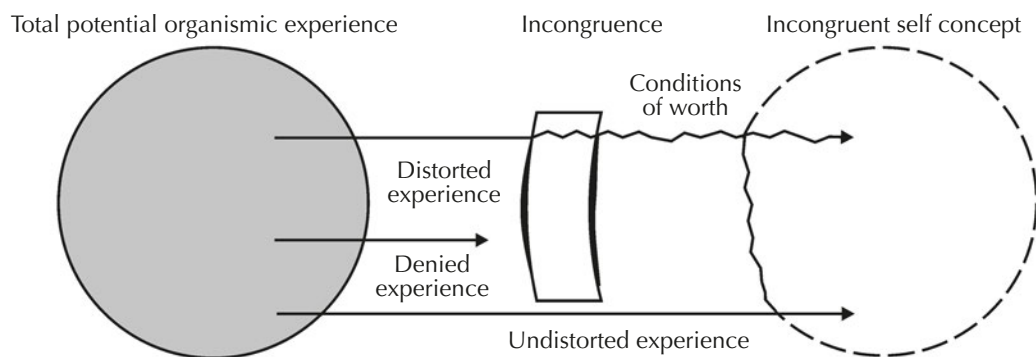


Figure 12.3 A diagram representing a state of incongruity
Source: Moore (2016)

As you can see from the given information, the congruence or incongruence between organismic experience and the self-concept is at the very core of Rogers' theory. More recent writers, such as Solomon (1990), have pointed to the possibility of different forms of incongruence (see the Enrichment section below for more information).

Enrichment

Solomon (1990:40) says: ‘Health as Rogers defined it, is a state of congruence among three human processes: (1) organismic experience, the spontaneous and uncensored immediacy of feelings, needs, and awareness; (2) the symbolization of that experience, most specifically into the construct labeled “self-concept”; and (3) the communication of events. Health takes on a personal or a social definition, then, depending upon the locus of incongruence and conflict in this three-way set of interactions. If experience and symbolisation are in conflict, then the pathological consequences are personal. However, if experience and symbolization conflict with the expression of that experience, then the pathological consequences are social.’

Solomon (1990) therefore distinguishes between incongruence whose consequences are of a *personal* nature, and incongruence whose consequences are of a *social* nature. Personal incongruence has to do with incongruence between organismic experience and the self-concept (in other words, incongruence between (1) and (2) in the quotation) and it is the kind of incongruence to which Rogers usually refers in his theory.

Solomon (1990) also mentions the possibility of social incongruence. This occurs where organismic experience is, in fact, symbolised in the self-concept, but this experience cannot be expressed or communicated (in other words, (1) and (2) are congruent, but there is incongruence between (1) and (2); and (3)). In such a case, while it would be possible to experience personal congruence, social incongruence could nevertheless occur in certain social contexts.

It is fair to speculate whether this incongruence proposed by Solomon (1990), namely incongruence with pathological consequences of a social nature, could not be linked to the idea that the theory might also be difficult to apply when someone is speaking on behalf of a group or persuasion and the views expressed might not necessarily reflect his or her personal views.

Could we regard Solomon’s suggestion that we distinguish different forms of incongruence as an attempt to fill this gap, which Rogers himself identifies?

The example Rogers (1959) uses in the statement we have just quoted refers to people who are, indeed, attuned to organismic feelings and experiences and who are therefore congruent in a personal sense, yet who do not, in a social context, behave in accordance with values of their own that are part of their self-concept, but in accordance with the values of whatever they are representing. We may have seen something like this in South Africa in the events surrounding the 1994 election, when political leaders who could certainly be described as congruent, fully-functioning persons in terms of Rogers’ theory could not reach a compromise when they met as representatives of their parties, but could indeed make progress with the negotiations in personal, face-to-face meetings.

Self-evaluation question

- Explain the concepts ‘congruence’ and ‘incongruence’ in terms of Rogers’ theory and illustrate your explanation with practical examples.

12.5.4 The role of the self-concept in experience

According to Rogers, how does the person actually deal with real-life experiences?

Rogers says there are three ways in which people deal with experiences. They can either *ignore* them or they can *symbolise* them – in other words, allow them into consciousness; or they can *refuse to symbolise* them – in other words, prevent them from reaching consciousness (see proposition 11 in the Enrichment section).

The individual's *specific needs* and *self-concept* determine which of these three possibilities is most appropriate.

- *Experiences may be ignored* simply because at that moment they are irrelevant to the person's needs. At another time, however, the same experience might well be *allowed into consciousness*.

Example

Someone may pass an emergency pharmacy every day and not notice it, but suddenly register that it is there when he or she has a raging headache.

- Experiences may be *symbolised* when they correspond with the individual's needs.

Example

A student working on an assignment will be quick to spot a book dealing with its topic.

- Experiences are *allowed into consciousness* when they correspond with a person's self-concept.

Example

A woman who sees herself as incompetent will be quick to pounce on her own mistakes. The flopped cake, the burnt dinner and her failure to remind her boss of an appointment are all experiences corresponding with her self-concept and therefore easily admissible into her consciousness. Indeed, her self-concept of incompetence is actually affirmed by them.

- Experiences are *denied access to consciousness* because they are contrary to the self-concept.

Example

In some cases, denial and distortion are fairly conscious. The woman who feels incompetent will be unable to admit that she has baked a prize cake; even though others may compliment her on her baking, she will simply not believe them. She might also distort the experience to fit her self-concept by declaring that the cake did not rise properly or her success was a fluke, in this way retaining her view of herself as incompetent.

Denial and distortion also take place on an unconscious level when the organism has a need or an experience that cannot be symbolised because it is completely incongruent with the self-concept. In this case, the self-concept is threatened and must be protected.

Example

A son may experience anger towards his parents but, because he sees himself as an obedient son, will not allow himself to experience that anger consciously. He may well experience the physiological changes that go with anger, but his self-concept will either refuse to symbolise the anger or will distort and then symbolise it, perhaps by having a 'serious headache'.

It might well be asked how someone determines whether an experience that he or she does not allow into consciousness is a threat. Rogers (1980:506–507) posits a form of perception on the unconscious level, which he calls *subception*. Through this process the experience not in keeping with the self-concept is 'traced' or selected on the unconscious level and then defended against. This 'tracing' of an experience that contains a threat to the self-concept might be accompanied by anxiety. Rogers points out, however, that there is no conclusive evidence in research of the existence of a process like subception.

12.5.5 The role of the self-concept in determining behaviour

Although the actualising of the organismic potential is the basic motive for behaviour, Rogers also points out that most of what a person does corresponds with the *self-concept* (see proposition 12 in the Enrichment). Thus the self-concept also plays an important role in determining behaviour, and a problem can arise if the individual's needs do not accord with the self-concept.

Example

A mother experiences the organismic need to spend some time on her own affairs. However, she sees herself as a 'good mother'. What she does will depend on what values are included in her view of what a good mother is. If she has taken over the values of other people, and believes that to be a good mother you always have to put your own needs below those of your children, there is a problem. The need to devote time to herself then becomes incongruent with her particular self-concept of what a good mother should be.

According to Rogers, this mother will be inclined to show behaviour that corresponds with her self-concept. She drives her children from place to place, sees to it that they are cared for, listens to their problems and attends every conceivable sporting event. She feels the irritation building up inside because she never has time for herself, but cannot allow this into her consciousness because it would be in conflict with her self-concept of a good mother. She may suppress or deny the irritation for some time, but the irritation she feels because of her lack of time for herself may become apparent in distorted ways.

(continued)

In a case such as this the individual tends to exhibit behaviour in which the denied needs are satisfied without coming into conflict with the self-concept. The mother in question would perhaps express her need for some time to herself, as well as her irritation with the children in aggression towards them. She would be able to justify this to herself only if the children really deserved it, however, and would therefore have to seek out specific behaviour that merited aggression towards them. She might, for instance, describe the children's behaviour as impossible, and in this way justify the fact that she hit them and shouted at them. In reality, the children might be naughty occasionally but are generally pleasant; the mother would therefore have to distort her experience of their behaviour to retain her image of herself as a good mother, and also to construe her own behaviour in such a way that it corresponds with her self-concept. In this way she could regard her 'screaming and shouting' behaviour as 'good' behaviour appropriate to the 'good mother'. So the mother would deny responsibility for her own behaviour and blame the children for her outbursts.

In the example we have just given, the mother gave vent to her irritation about not being able to devote time to her own affairs, but in a distorted way. In addition, she had to distort her perception of her children's behaviour, as well as her perception of her own behaviour, in order to comply with her self-concept. In her case, she still did not satisfy her need to spend time on herself. All she achieved was the expression, in a distorted way, of the irritation created by the unfulfilled need. What follows is an example in which a person does manage to satisfy an underlying, unacknowledged need, but by resorting to distortion.

Example

A boy sees himself as brave but doesn't like rough games such as rugby. He copes with this conflict by developing a stomach upset just before the match, so fulfilling his need to stay away from the game but retaining his image of himself as a brave boy. He may even be brave enough to watch his friends play rugby despite his indisposition!

Sometimes the denied needs become so strong that they evoke behaviour in which they are satisfied directly, and not through channels that correspond with the self-concept. When this happens the individual is not prepared to 'own' his or her behaviour. The mother who shouts, 'I hate you', when caught off guard will later say that she does not know what was wrong with her, and the 'brave' boy who bursts into tears when the teacher tries to force him to play rugby, will apologise later and claim that he was not himself.

According to Rogers, individuals function ideally when their self-concepts are congruent with their needs and feelings. Their behaviour then reveals and corresponds to the self-concept, and also reflects their needs and feelings. If the 'good mother' in our example had a more complete self-concept, her behaviour would have been more congruent, as she would have been able to see herself, not only as a mother responsible for rearing her children, but also as someone with the right to devote time to her own affairs; as someone friendly and loving but capable of irritation at times. In congruent functioning she would have less need to deny or distort her experiences and her behaviour would be more directed towards actualisation of her potential.

Here you should take particular note of propositions 9, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15 in the Enrichment section.

Activity

Pay special attention to your behaviour during a particular day. At the end of the day apply Rogers' theory to consider the following:

Did your view of yourself influence your functioning? State reasons why you feel it did or did not.

Self-evaluation question

- What is the role of the self-concept in determining behaviour, according to Rogers?

12.6 The development of the personality

What does Rogers say about how we develop into the kind of person we are?

Rogers proposed *general principles of development* rather than formulating specific stages. As is evident in the previous section, Rogers believes the most important areas of human functioning are the interaction between the person's experience and his or her self-concept, and the crucial role of the self-concept in determining behaviour. The main issue for Rogers in personality development is therefore the formation of the self-concept.

The new-born infant does not distinguish between what is 'him' or 'her' and 'not him' or 'not her' and his or her phenomenal field is therefore undifferentiated.

Gradually differentiation occurs between the organism and his or her world and the baby begins to experience himself or herself as a separate entity.

Rogers says the organism functions at this early stage only in accordance with the *organismic evaluation process*. In terms of this process, the organism's functioning is directed towards fulfilling its own needs, and it judges that which is advantageous as positive and that which is disadvantageous as negative. Hunger, cold and pain are judged as negative, and food, water, love and security as positive. So the evaluation process deals with satisfying only the individual's own basic needs and not those of others. The self-concept develops gradually, as a result of the individual's interactions with the social environment in particular and as a consequence of the evaluation of others, and then begins to exert an influence on functioning.

The development of the self-concept is subsequently dealt with in more detail.

12.6.1 The development of the self-concept

In the discussion of the self-concept as a structural element, it was pointed out that individuals attach specific meanings to experiences that involve them and that these are incorporated into the *self-concept*. Children who excel at athletics therefore see themselves as good athletes. Meanings and values which are not based on people's own experiences are also incorporated into their self-concepts, however. As has been indicated, Rogers regards the need for positive regard and the actualising tendency as fundamental to the functioning of all organisms. All those people who are closely connected to an individual and who help satisfy his or her need for positive regard play an important role in the development of that individual's self-concept. Rogers calls them 'significant others'. Initially parents fill this role but later other members of the family, relatives, friends, colleagues and anyone who forms an important part of the person's world play a role in the development of the self-concept. There are two key factors in the development of the self-concept: *unconditional positive regard* and *conditional positive regard*.

KEY TERM

unconditional positive regard: accepting people for what they are, just as they are

Unconditional positive regard

People who are given **unconditional positive regard** are accepted by significant others for what they are, just as they are. They are accepted as people with specific needs that are peculiar to them and that are not measured against the needs of others; nor are others' needs forced on them. They need not fulfil specific requirements to gain the esteem of the significant others and are therefore able to acknowledge all their needs and express their feelings. These individuals' self-concepts are free to include all their experiences and there is congruence between their potential and their self-concepts. There are no limitations imposed on these fortunate individuals, and it follows that behaviour that is in keeping with their self-concepts will also be in keeping with their organismic potential.

Unconditional acceptance therefore leads to complete actualisation of potential and allows individuals to realise all their innate abilities. The boy who wants to be a ballet dancer and has this desire accepted unconditionally is not then limited by societal norms; he is free to choose the career that he feels will use his talent best.

The boy who feels aggression towards his parents will feel free, in an accepting environment, to give vent to his real feelings and will not need to deny or distort them. The question arises whether Rogers believes that this boy's parents should accept his aggressive behaviour in a resigned and unconditional way. The answer seems to be 'no', because Rogers makes a distinction between *acceptance of the person* and *acceptance of the behaviour*.

He affirms that individuals themselves and their needs and feelings can be consistently accepted but that specific behaviour can be disapproved of.

Rogers' staunch phenomenological approach, which views subjective experience as the individual's only reality, is relevant here. It is not the specific behaviour of the

significant other that is important, but the individual's perception of it. The parents may think that they behave in an accepting way, but if the child experiences their behaviour as disapproving, or reads ambiguity into it, his or her perception will influence the development of the self-concept.

Example

In the given example, the parents would have to make absolutely sure that their son knew that they understood his aggressive feelings and his right to feel them, that they loved him nevertheless, but that they found his aggressive behaviour unacceptable. The boy would have to interpret their message correctly to still feel accepted.

In practice, it is rare outside the therapeutic situation to find such a distinction between acceptance of behaviour and acceptance of the person. It should be remembered, however, that Rogers believes people are basically good; that congruent people choose behaviour that is consistent with their organismic evaluation process and will assist the maintenance and enhancement of the organism; and that they will not choose behaviour that is to their detriment. Rogers (1961:359) admits that he remains uncertain about the effect of freedom of expression on behaviour. He nevertheless proposes that individuals be free to give symbolic expression to their true inner needs but that some behaviour should be limited by societal norms because the expression of some emotions, hatred towards a mother, for example, may result in guilt rather than a sense of freedom. Rogers presumes that individuals will exercise their freedom responsibly and choose constructive behaviour.

Conditional positive regard

It is clear that Rogers regards complete unconditional positive regard as the ideal environment in which individuals' potential can be fully actualised. The ideal, however, is unattainable as few people spend their lives in such an environment. It is far more likely that every person will sometimes experience non-acceptance by significant others and will feel worthy only when he or she has fulfilled certain conditions laid down by them. Rogers calls this **conditional positive regard**. If the boy who does well at athletics receives love and approval only when he has performed well on the athletics track, he experiences conditional positive regard. He has fulfilled the conditions laid down for him by his significant others, which Rogers calls *conditions of worth*. He might formulate their conditions for himself as: 'My parents accept me only if I am a good sportsman.' He then distorts this condition and makes it his own value by incorporating it into his self-concept so that he sees himself as a good sportsman.

KEY TERM

conditional positive regard: accepting people only when they fulfil certain conditions

His self-concept is therefore likely to exclude characteristics such as 'bad sportsman' because they would spell rejection to him. To be accepted and have his need for love and approval from others satisfied, he must be good at all kinds of sport. If he chances to be bad at rugby or cricket, he will have to deny or distort this fact to accommodate it in his self-concept; in this way he can blame the weak coach or develop a migraine, which 'strangely enough' does not happen when he plays a sport he is good at!

Again it should be stressed that Rogers as a phenomenologist emphasises the individual's subjective interpretation of acceptance and rejection. A son may experience his mother as rejecting of his aggressive inclinations, but the mother may not be doing so deliberately. For the boy, 'non-aggression' becomes a condition of worth and he sees himself as a non-aggressive person. Another mother may make her son feel that shyness is unacceptable and that he must be aggressive in order to be accepted. His shyness is therefore rejected in such a way that he experiences it as rejection of his person.

Approval or disapproval is not always conveyed verbally. Even body language and what is unstated can convey approval or disapproval.

Conditions of worth therefore represent the values that the person includes in his or her self-concept. These values, in turn, are based on the values of others which are incorporated into the self-concept. The more conditional positive regard individuals receive, the more they include conditions of worth in their self-concepts and the more incongruent they become; in other words, there is a lack of congruence between their self-concepts and organismic experiences. They function like horses wearing blinkers because they are conscious or can become conscious of only a part of their experiences. This unfortunate situation reduces individuals' ability to actualise their potential and impairs their development towards fully functioning individuals.

Activity

Look at yourself in the mirror. How do you feel about the person you see in the mirror?

Apply Rogers' theory and decide whether you agree or disagree with Rogers when he says that how you feel about yourself will influence your behaviour. State reasons for your answer.

Make a list of the people whom you think have contributed to the view you have of yourself. Mark the names of those who have contributed in a positive way with a star and those who have had a negative influence with a cross. (Perhaps some names might have a star and a cross!)

Activity

Now, let's put a different perspective on things.

According to Rogers you are also someone else's significant other, not so? Have a conversation with one of your siblings or with a friend and ask whether he or she is receiving unconditional or conditional regard from you. Record what you have learnt from this conversation.

Self-evaluation question

- What role does Rogers assign to 'significant others' in the functioning of an individual? Refer to the need for positive regard and to conditional and unconditional acceptance.

12.7 Optimal development

What would Rogers regard as ideal, optimal development?

In proposition 14 in the Enrichment, it is proposed that psychological adjustment occurs when the self-concept is such that all of the individual's experiences are, or can be, assimilated at a symbolic level in relation to the self-concept. Accordingly, a person who is psychologically adjusted is capable of allowing all experiences into the self-concept. This is like the congruent people described in 12.5.3 who see themselves as they really are and whose self-concepts accord with their actual potential. The basic implication of this is as follows: The wider the spectrum of experience available to people and the more integrated these experiences are in the self-concept, the better they will know themselves and be able to use their abilities and talents, choose constructive action and realise their potential fully. Such people are regarded as being *fully functioning*.

Rogers (1961:185–187) states unequivocally that 'the good life' is not a static nirvana in which the person experiences satisfaction, happiness and fulfilment or tension reduction, drive reduction and homeostasis. It is a process, not a static state, in which organisms continuously strive to fulfil their potential; a direction, not a destination.

Basing his observations on people who have been in therapy, Rogers says the fully functioning person displays the following characteristics. These characteristics do not function independently of one another and, as you will see, they are often linked.

12.7.1 A growing openness to experience

The fully functioning person is concerned with a process of psychic adaptation where-by he or she moves away from defensiveness and is increasingly *open to experience*.

People who can be completely open to all experiences, be they internal or external, have no need of subception or defence. It does not matter whether the experience is a colour or sound in the environment, a memory from the past or a feeling of fear or happiness – these individuals are able to experience them all consciously as part of themselves and their world.

12.7.2 An increasingly existential lifestyle

Rogers (1961:189) describes this as an increasing *tendency to live each moment fully*: 'To open one's spirit to what is going on now, and to discover in that present process whatever structure it appears to have ...'

An existential existence allows the person to approach experience without a preconceived structure, permitting the experience itself to form and reform the structure from moment to moment. The self-concept and the personality emanate from the experience; experience is not distorted and remodelled to fit the self-concept.

Each moment is new because the person does not know what he or she will be or how he or she will respond in the next moment. This openness to experience speaks of excitement, daring, adaptability, tolerance, spontaneity and a lack of rigidity, and presumes an underlying foundation of trust.

12.7.3 Increasing organismic trust

A further characteristic of fully functioning people is that they *trust themselves* increasingly when choosing behaviour appropriate to a specific situation. Rather than depending on existing codes, social norms or the judgement of others, individuals find more and more that if they are open to all experiences their sense of what is right is a reliable guide to satisfactory behaviour.

12.7.4 Freedom of choice

This is another characteristic of the fully functioning person. It means that individuals can make whatever *choices* they like in terms of the total experiential fields to which they become increasingly open. They are free to do so because they feel responsible for their choices and that they play a role in determining their own behaviour.

Fully functioning people who have to make career choices, for example, are open to both the positive and the negative aspects of their abilities and to all relevant information available to them. These people feel free to exercise any choice based on their organismic evaluation. In contrast, incongruent people who are artistic but who deny this area of the self-concept are not free to choose careers in which they can use this artistic ability; such people cannot choose what they want.

12.7.5 Creativity

Creativity is also associated with optimal functioning. It is self-evident that a person who has all the characteristics previously mentioned and who is therefore open to a wide spectrum of experiences, will feel free to make choices, experience the novelty of each moment, trust his or her own judgement, and be and live creatively.

Rogers believes this kind of person will adapt constructively to society but without being a conformist; he or she will be able to adjust to changing environments relatively easily and in a creative way.

12.7.6 Basic reliability and constructiveness

Rogers (1961:194–195) is convinced that the fully functioning person who is basically good and open to a wide variety of his or her own needs and to the demands of the environment and society, can be *trusted to act positively and constructively*. The person who is able to admit and accept all his or her needs is also able to maintain a realistic balance among them. Rogers believes there is no danger of such a person's aggressive needs getting out of hand. Though Rogers does acknowledge the existence of aggressive needs, he believes that the person's intrinsic goodness and the need to show love towards others are equally strong.

Rogers objects to the belief that people are basically irrational. He points out that the fully functioning person is an example of an organism that can give full recognition to rationality. Control is all that is necessary to maintain balance among the different needs and to work out the most constructive way for people to live in harmony with themselves and others. Rogers staunchly believes that the fully functioning person is capable of such control.

12.7.7 A rich, full life

Finally, Rogers says that the lives of fully functioning people are *rich, full and exciting* and that they experience joy and pain, love and heartbreak, fear and courage intensely.

The fully functioning person can experience moments of happiness, enjoyment and satisfaction, but adjectives such as enriching, exciting, rewarding, challenging and meaningful are particularly apt when describing the process that Rogers (1961:195–196) calls *the good life*.

This process of the good life is not, I am convinced, a life for the fainthearted. It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life.

Activity

Consider the seven characteristics Rogers ascribes to the fully functioning person.

Write down the name of someone you know and whom you would regard as a fully functioning person.

Under his or her name, write down those characteristics of the fully functioning person which you have observed in this person's functioning.

Self-evaluation question

- How does Rogers describe the fully functioning person?

12.8 Views on psychopathology

Rogers has such a positive view of human beings, but does he have anything to say about pathological, malfunctioning people?

What emerges clearly from the previous discussion is that the incongruent person who is always on the defensive and cannot be open to all experiences can never function ideally and may even *malfunction*.

Bearing in mind that the self-concept is the symbolised version of the organism's experiential field and that incongruence results when a large part of this symbolised private world of experience is denied, it is understandable that incongruence is coupled with a certain amount of tension.

When an incongruent experience on the unconscious level is experienced by subception, it threatens the self-concept and is accompanied by anxiety. According to Rogers (1951) anxiety is the emotional (affective) response when the self-concept is threatened.

Example

Continuing the example of the 'good mother', she cannot admit into her consciousness her aggressive feelings towards her children and so she experiences anxiety. To satisfy her organismic need for aggression, she must find a channel congruent with her self-concept of being a good mother. A good mother can measure out punishment when it is deserved and in this distorted way the mother justifies her perception of her children's behaviour as bad and therefore punishable.

The conscious experience of incongruence can also be threatening. If the mother were to be told that various observers had rated her as a rejecting mother, the resulting incongruence would be a tremendous threat and she would feel tense and anxious.

The threat to the self-concept and the accompanying anxiety is the trigger for defensive behaviour.

12.8.1 Defence mechanisms

According to Freud's theory, defence mechanisms are used by the ego to satisfy the id drives in ways that comply with the demands of society and reality. If the sexual and death drives were allowed to be satisfied without inhibition, this could lead to the destruction of the individual. So, for Freud, defence mechanisms are vital for the survival of the individual. By contrast, Rogers maintains that *defence mechanisms* are used to protect the self-concept. For him, the ideal would be for the individual to be aware of all organismic experiences and to assimilate them into the self-concept so that defence mechanisms become unnecessary.

Unfortunately, this ideal is actually never attained, and defence mechanisms are used to preserve the self-concept and protect it against incongruent experiences. Whereas Freud describes a number of defence mechanisms, Rogers refers to two basic defence mechanisms – *distortion* and *denial*.

- In the case of *distortion*, the incongruent experience is distorted to fit the self-concept so that the self-concept remains intact and is not disorganised. The mother would simply not be able to accommodate in her self-concept the observers' rating of her as rejecting. She would probably either question the proficiency of the raters or volunteer many examples of behaviour to counteract the accusations. In the same way, the student who regards himself or herself as completely incompetent and who receives a high mark for an assignment will probably say that the professor is mad. In this way the integrity of the self-concept is preserved.
- *Denial* is the process whereby experiences that are not congruent with the self-concept are simply ignored and excluded from consciousness. The student who was denied admission to an examination but nevertheless turns up to write the exam is an illustration of the process of denial. When deep-seated needs are denied, there are serious consequences for the functioning of the individual.

Self-evaluation question

- What is the role of defence mechanisms in human functioning, according to Rogers? How does this differ from the role Freud assigns to defence mechanisms?

12.8.2 Malfunctioning

The question arises: Why does a person already on the defensive tend to become more so? According to Rogers (1951:516), Hogan offers an explanation for the generalisation of defence. He says that defensive behaviour reduces the person's consciousness of the threat, but not the threat itself. The mother who has been described by one clinical psychologist as rejecting could react by denigrating the psychologist, but this would not guarantee that another clinical psychologist would not reach the same diagnosis. In this way, through denial, she incorporates another distorted perception into her self-concept: 'I cannot be helped by any psychologist.' This growing system of misconceptions increases the possibility of threatening experiences as the false structure becomes bigger and must be maintained.

Rogers is opposed to attaching labels to people and will therefore not easily categorise behaviour as neurotic or psychotic. It is, however, possible to arrange people on a hypothetical continuum according to the amount of defensive behaviour they display. The more incongruent the person, the more threatened he or she is by experiences, the more defensive he or she is and the more rigid the organisation of the self-structure. Hjelle and Ziegler (1981:414–415), on the basis of Rogers' theory, decided that certain degrees of *malfunctioning* could be distinguished.

Although anxiety has become a characteristic of our modern society, most people have defence mechanisms adequate to handle moderate incongruity. Hjelle and Ziegler (1981:415) point out, however, that it might happen that the degree of incongruence becomes immoderate; the individual's behaviour is often restricted and discomforting, leading him or her to seek help from a psychotherapist. Such behaviour can be described as typically 'neurotic' and, although the self-concept can be maintained through the neurotic behaviour, the person's functioning is rather precarious and he or she is psychologically vulnerable.

It might also happen that incongruence takes on such dimensions that a person's defences no longer function effectively. A 'defenceless' situation develops, different from the ideal state outlined by Rogers where no defence mechanisms exist because there is no incongruity. Here incongruities do exist and become conscious, causing the incorporation of contradictory experiences into the self-concept. This type of personality disorganisation is usually described as psychotic and is characterised by bizarre, irrational behaviour often linked to earlier denied parts of the self which erupt uncontrollably.

Rogers' therapeutic method, termed *person-centred therapy*, seeks to bring about greater harmony between the self-concept and the total organismic field of experience. This will be examined in more depth later.

12.9 Implications and applications

Does Rogers' theory have value only in a therapeutic context, or can it be used in other areas of life?

Rogers' belief that unconditional positive regard promotes healthy development has implications for many areas of life.

12.9.1 Psychotherapy

In view of the fact that Rogers' theory originated in the psychotherapeutic context, his views on therapy are well worth attending to. Note, as well, that propositions 17 and 18 in the Enrichment section have a bearing on psychotherapy.

Initially, Rogerian therapy focused on a therapist who listened with unstinting attention and made few contributions to the conversation. This, of course, is the source of the caricature that we still see today of the therapist who says 'mm-hmm, mm-hmm' to everything a client says. It was also in this early phase that the so-called *reflection of feelings* in therapy came under the spotlight.

Rogers reacted vehemently whenever he was accused of doing no more than reflect the feelings of his clients. He maintained that every question he asked was intended to ensure that he understood his client correctly and that he attached the correct significance to the client's experiences. This is how he puts it (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990a:127–128):

I am NOT trying to 'reflect feelings' ... Each response of mine contains the unspoken question: Is this the way it is in you?

This misconception seems to be one of the reasons why Rogers stopped linking his approach to the reflection of feelings, but referred to his therapy specifically as client-centred therapy. Still later, he spoke of his approach as person-centred therapy, because he believed that his therapeutic principles could be adapted and used, not just in the client–therapist relationship of the therapeutic context, but also in other contexts such as education and commerce (Rogers, 1982b).

According to Rogers, the purpose of psychotherapy is to provide clients with the opportunity to come to know themselves fully and to reveal their potential. This takes place in a therapeutic climate in which the therapist accepts the client unconditionally.

For Rogers (1951), the emphasis is not just on a method or technique but on the quality of the relationship between the people in the therapeutic situation. This approach in psychotherapy is known as *person-centred therapy*.

12.9.2 The therapeutic process

In the therapeutic process, the client is central and must take responsibility for his or her own change. The therapist acts as a *facilitator* who creates a climate of unconditional positive regard, warmth and empathy in which the client feels free and safe to allow change and to strive towards congruence and the actualisation of his or her potential.

Rogers (1980:42) was fond of quoting the following words of the Chinese philosopher, Lao Tse:

A leader is best when people barely know he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him, worst when they despise him ... But of a good leader, who talks little, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will all say 'We did this all ourselves'.

This orientation of Rogers was strikingly apparent during a demonstration session in Cape Town during his 1982 visit to South Africa. He said little during the session and was so immersed in the world of the client that he was completely unaware of what was happening in the hall. Some 'Rogerian therapists' who were present regarded this experience as a total anticlimax and expressed their disappointment rather sharply. Rogers simply accepted their disappointment and made no attempt whatsoever to reinstate himself, in their eyes, as their hero. The client, however, reacted strongly to the therapists' attack on Rogers. She was clearly upset and angry about their uninvited intrusion into her personal space and their disturbance of the peace she had experienced within herself. She was grateful that Rogers had allowed her to go only as far as she was ready to go (Jankowitz, 1982).

Thus, for Rogers, what is salient is not the power a therapist has with a client, but the *transfer of power* ('empowerment') to that person. In the therapeutic process, the individual is given the freedom to exercise autonomous choices and to act creatively, productively, constructively and responsibly (Rogers, 1982; O'Leary, 1989). This is why Len Holdstock (Jankowitz, 1982:28) says that Carl Rogers spells GURU, 'Gee yoU aRe yoU'!

Rogers (1980:68) sees the role of the therapist as that of a gardener – a 'facilitator of growth'.

My garden supplies the same intriguing question I have been trying to meet in all my professional life: What are the effective conditions for growth? But in my garden though the frustrations are just as immediate, the results, whether success or failure, are more quickly evident. And when through patient, intelligent, and understanding care I have provided the conditions that result in the production of a rare or glorious bloom, I feel the same kind of satisfaction that I have felt in the facilitation of growth in a person or in a group of persons.

Thus it is the task of the therapist to create a *growth-facilitating climate*. According to Rogers (1982b), the therapeutic climate must include the following three elements in order to foster growth:

- The first element involves *sincerity* or *congruence* of the therapist. Clients are most likely to grow if the therapist is really able to be himself or herself in the relationship, and does not hold up a façade. There has to be congruence between what the therapist is experiencing deep inside, what is in his or her consciousness, and what he or she actually says to the client. The therapist is an authentic person.
- The second element that promotes change is the therapist's attitude of *unconditional acceptance*, or caring. The therapist must be able to care in a non-possessive way, and the client must feel accepted, even though feelings

of confusion, fear, fury, courage, love or pride may be expressed at any given moment. The therapist treats the client with respect ('prizes the client'), without laying down conditions. The third facilitating element in the relationship is that the therapist should understand with *empathy*. Rogers refers here to a special kind of listening. It implies that the therapist is so attuned to the client's world that he or she can clarify not only the meaning of experiences of which the client is aware, but also of experiences that lie just below conscious awareness.

Rogers (1951) makes it clear that the therapist should not be passive or *laissez faire*, because that might make the client feel rejected. Similarly, the therapist should not clarify the client's feelings in a cold, clinical and apparently omniscient way but should rather enquire with empathy and subtlety whether the reflections of the client's feelings are accurate. For example, in responding to a client's statement about his or her mother, the therapist should not say something such as: 'You dislike her or her criticism', but something along the lines of: 'If I understand you correctly, her criticism is hurtful to you. Is that right?'

It is the function of the therapist to observe from the *client's frame of reference*; to observe the world as the client sees it; to see the client as he or she sees himself or herself; to put aside external observations and thereby communicate empathic understanding to the client.

Although the three elements discussed are mentioned in most of Rogers' works as the prerequisites for a growth-promoting climate, he later introduced the possibility of a further characteristic, which he discovered when he was functioning at his best as a facilitator. It is probably best to quote Rogers himself (1982b:2) in this regard:

I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing ... At those moments it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself, and has become a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present ... I am compelled to believe that I, like many others, have underestimated the importance of this mystical, *spiritual dimension*.

From this it is clear that the changes in Rogers' therapeutic approach represent a development and broadening that are in line with his willingness to be open to new experiences and to integrate new insights into his thinking. Apart from the acknowledgement of a possible spiritual dimension in therapy, later developments relate to the idea that the principles of client-centred therapy need not necessarily be limited to the therapeutic situation alone, but can be applied to any interpersonal relationship – marriage, child–parent, teacher–student, or group members. The most recent designation, *person-centred approach*, reflects how broad an application it has.

Example

The following conversation between a therapist and a client visualises the person-centred approach:

Mrs White: And then he looked at me in this cold way and turned around and walked out ... My heart was racing, and it felt as if I had a heavy stone inside my chest. ... And then I couldn't breathe ...

Therapist: You were feeling that he had no feelings for you and that he just walked away from you. [Looking emphatically at Mrs White] ... And that made you feel completely panicked, so that your heart was racing and it took your breath away. And you felt as if you were carrying this heavy load, almost like a stone ...

Mrs White: I didn't know I felt like that.

Therapist: You were realising how you really felt.

The link below provides access to a short video in which Dave Mearns and Brian Thorne discuss the third edition of their book, *Person-Centred Counselling*, on YouTube. [Uploaded by SAGE:

<http://www.sagepub.co.uk>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvN781-RqPk>

From the example it is clear that the therapist is trying to communicate to Mrs White (the client), in an empathic way, his understanding of her experiences and emotions and allowing her to make her own discoveries.

Cooper *et al* (2013) provide valuable guidelines for the implementation of the person-centred approach in various therapeutic contexts and the book by Mearns, Thorne and McLeod (2013) serves as a support for trainees and practitioners in the field of person-centred counselling.

Enrichment

During the eighth International Forum on the Person-Centred Approach held in Japan in 2001, one of the Japanese participants (Mikuni, 2001) pointed out some interesting parallels between the Japanese tea ceremony – The Way of Tea – and the necessary therapeutic conditions suggested by Carl Rogers' person-centred approach.

Sen Rikyu was once asked to explain what the Way of Tea entails. He replied that it was a matter of observing but seven rules:

1. Make a satisfying bowl of tea.
2. Lay the charcoal so that the water boils efficiently.
3. Provide a sense of warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer.
4. Arrange the flowers as though they were in the field.
5. Be ready ahead of time.
6. Be prepared in case it should rain.
7. Act with utmost consideration towards your guest.

According to the well-known story relating to the dialogue between Rikyu and the questioner mentioned above, the questioner was vexed by Rikyu's reply, saying that those were simple matters that anyone could handle. To this Rikyu responded that he would become a disciple of the person who could carry them out without fail. (Urasenke's home page: 1 February 2001.)

(continued)

In a similar vein, the therapeutic conditions suggested by Rogers are profound in their simplicity and the role of the therapist closely resembles that of the host in the tea ceremony. In both the Way of Tea and the person-centred therapeutic context, it is of the utmost importance to provide a conducive atmosphere where the guest/client can be held in comfort and safety. The host/therapist does not show panic and does not judge, but is prepared for all possibilities. The 'tea' is prepared for the guest/client, not for the host/therapist, and the host/therapist needs to prepare spiritually before the encounter. How we are, not what we do, is important. The focus needs to be on the simple things and on natural balances.

Self-evaluation question

- What basic conditions does Rogers identify for successful therapy?

12.9.3 Education

Rogers (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990b:180) refers to traditional educational philosophy as the 'jug and mug' theory. The instructor, or teacher, is the jug that pours knowledge from above into the passively receiving mug (the student). Rogers believes that the learning experience should be more than gaining knowledge; it should be meaningful to the individual and make a difference to his or her life. An approach such as this implies that self-discovery plays an important role in the learning process and that the learner will take ownership of the learning content. This suggests that there should be a move away from the traditional approach in which the teacher becomes a kind of faceless symbol of the syllabus or is simply someone who makes demands that must be met, and in which students' efforts are measured against standards fixed by the teacher. In contrast, Rogers believes that *meaningful learning* will take place in the following conditions:

- Pupils should be in an *open, accepting atmosphere* in which they can explore problems of value and meaning to themselves.
- Teachers should not force their own feelings on others. They should be *sensitive and sympathetic* and not just faceless representatives of the syllabus or merely sterile conveyor belts of knowledge (Rogers, 1961).
- Teachers should approach their students with *warmth and acceptance*, accept pupils unconditionally and *empathise* with their fears, expectations and disappointments when they are confronted with new material.
- Teachers should place themselves and their *knowledge* at the disposal of the pupils, and should also offer a wide range of sources and material. These should be available if the pupils regard them as useful and want to use them, but they should never be forced on students. With this approach, pupils themselves organise the knowledge they want to acquire, instead of having the teacher doing the organisation for them. An individual student or a group of students will accordingly choose their own curriculum within a specific framework, and presumably within the group there will be a wide range of interaction.

A *student-centred approach* of this nature would require a radical change in the educational system. The teacher's role would have to change from that of instructor to facilitator, and compulsory evaluation through tests and examinations give way to a system whereby the pupils themselves decided whether their ability in a particular field should be rated in order to qualify for a specific career or if they qualified for the next level of education. Rogers has in fact implemented these ideas in some of his courses and even allowed the students to evaluate their own individual progress.

In keeping with the notion of the actualising tendency, the hypothesis behind this approach to education is that students who encounter really meaningful problems will want to learn from them, to grow through them, to discover their value, to master them and to create new possibilities. Teachers, in turn, will see their role as one of developing personal relationships with the students by creating an atmosphere in which their natural tendency to actualise their potential can be fulfilled without having to prescribe to them how to do so.

Although such an unstructured approach could provoke vehement criticism and cause some practical problems, there have been positive results when the teacher had the courage to adopt it (Rogers, 1961:297–313).

As far as discipline in education is concerned, unconditional positive regard in Rogerian schools has shown discipline and punishment to be almost totally unnecessary, an idea that not everyone would accept.

Based on Carl Rogers' vision, Barbara McCombs (2013) has defined research validated principles and practices which she claims can transform our current educational system for what is needed in our 21st century world.

Self-evaluation question

- What are the implications of Rogers' theory for education?

12.9.4 Measurement and research

The emphasis that Rogers places on the phenomenological approach presupposes that his research material is primarily the individual's world of subjective experience. He nevertheless contends that objective methods should be used in a consistent, disciplined effort to understand subjective experience.

Therapy is the experience in which I can let myself go subjectively. Research is the experience in which I can stand off and try to view this rich subjective experience with objectivity, applying all the elegant methods of science to determine whether I have been deceiving myself. (Rogers, 1961:14)

Rogers opened the therapeutic situation to research by making his therapy sessions available on tape, allowing the therapeutic process and the changes that came about in therapy to be examined. This readiness to expose himself to criticism has brought about important developments in his therapeutic approach and also in research.

Rogers made extensive use of a method known as *content analysis* in examining his therapy sessions. It consists of categorising every word used by the client in relation to himself or herself during therapy. A Rogers student, Raimy (1948), for example, divided references to the self into six categories – positive or approving; negative or disapproving; ambivalent; ambiguous references; references to external objects and persons; and questions.

Rogers later used the well-known *Q-technique* developed by Stephenson (1953) in which the subject is asked to arrange a series of statements according to how accurately they describe his or her personality – for example, ‘I am exceptionally intelligent’ or ‘I love music’. The idea is that subjects organise the statements into nine categories, with the most relevant descriptions in the first category and the least relevant in the last. The subject may also be asked to place a predetermined number of cards in each category. For example: (4) – (6) – (8) – (10) – (12) – (10) – (8) – (6) – (4). (See Figure 12.4.)

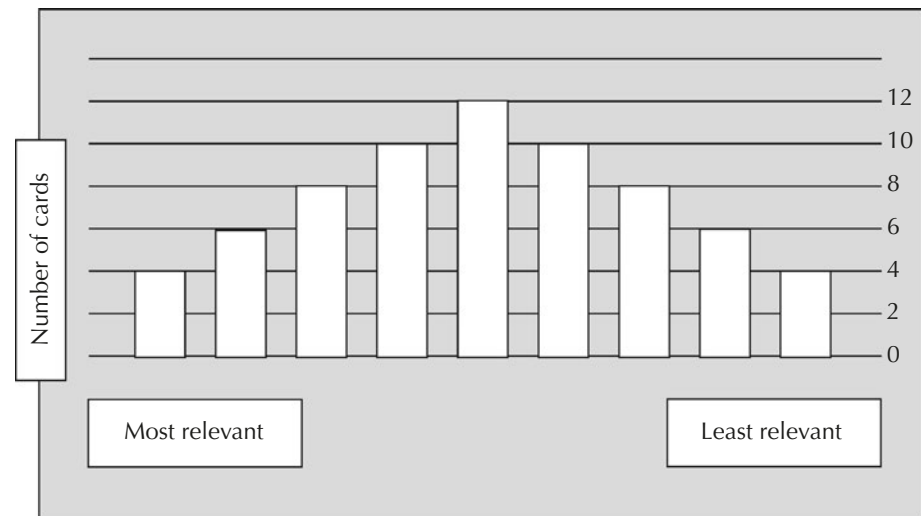


Figure 12.4 The forced arrangement of descriptive statements
Source: Moore (2016)

A forced arrangement such as this usually takes the form of a normal distribution. The subjects may also be required to arrange the statements to describe themselves as they would ideally like to be so that their self-concepts can be compared with their ideal self-concepts.

Rogers and his associates used questionnaires to evaluate both the therapeutic process and the effectiveness of the therapist. Kiesler (Rogers, 1967), for example, developed a scale that measures congruence between the therapist’s organismic experience and his or her self-concept. Coopersmith (1967) used a questionnaire to measure self-esteem and found, as Rogers predicted, that it developed in homes where the parents were accepting of their children and showed them love and warmth.

Ganley (1989) developed the *Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory* (BLRI) to measure empathy, acceptance and congruence – qualities that are regarded, in the Rogerian perspective, as significant indicators of the quality of interpersonal relationships. This measuring instrument is used to measure the client’s satisfaction in the therapeutic

relationship (Gurman, 1977), but the indications are that it can also be used to evaluate the quality of marital relationships (Wampler & Powell, 1982; Ganley, 1989).

Hutterer (1990) regards Rogers' approach as a personal attempt to heal the rift between the humanist–phenomenologist approach on the one hand and the natural sciences, empirical–experimental approach on the other – in other words, to achieve an integration of different perspectives in which the research process is enriched.

In an article entitled '*Towards a more human science of a person*', which Rogers (1985) published two years before his death, he is clearly excited about the shift he perceives towards more humanistic paradigms. He refers to the following as examples of works in which such a shift to alternative qualitative research methods can be seen, in which the goal is a deeper understanding of the human being rather than a search for the absolute truth (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990a:282–283). (In some cases new editions have since been published and are provided here.)

- Reason, P and Rowan, J (eds.). (1981). *Human inquiry: A source book of new paradigm research*. New York: John Wiley.
- Polkinghorne, D (1983). *Methodology of human sciences: Systems of inquiry*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Patton, MQ (2015). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. (4th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Miles, MB, Huberman, AM and Saldana, J (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A source book of new methods*. (3rd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

The website below is useful to update readers on the work of Peter Pearce in the field of Person-Centred research in the UK.

<http://www.metanoia.ac.uk/research-publications/research/person-centred-research/>

Rogers is impressed with the rich variety of subjects studied by means of a combination of alternative research methods, but expresses his concern that so few of these works are finally published. His message of encouragement to researchers who advocate a more humanist science of the person is (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990a:291): 'Instead of "Publish or perish", our slogan should be "Don't hide your light under a bushel!"'.

Self-evaluation question

- What contributions did Rogers' theory make in the field of research?

Enrichment

Examples of South-African research with links to the Person-Centred Approach:

1. Cilliers, F (2011). Positive Psychology leadership coaching experiences in a financial organization. *S.A. Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 37(1) Art#933, 14 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v37i1933>
2. Cilliers, F and May, M (2012). The directors' roles in containing the Robben Island Diversity (RIDE). *S.A. Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 38(2), Art#986, 10 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4202/sajip.v38i2.986>
3. De Kock, D (2011). Challenges and Changes in Teaching Person-Centred Counselling to Social Work Learners via Distance Education. *Social Work Journal*, 47(4). <http://socialwork.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/116>

12.9.5 The interpretation and handling of aggression

Does Rogers have anything to say about aggression?

Reacting to Rollo May's view (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990b) that good and evil are part of the fabric of human nature, Rogers points out that he is fully aware of the incredibly high incidence of destructive, cruel behaviour in the world today. But he does not believe that this evil is inherent in human nature. He believes that, in a nurturing, growth-promoting climate, the individual can be trusted to make constructive choices that will lead to improved socialisation and better relationships with others.

People do sometimes choose behaviour that harms themselves or others, but for Rogers, cultural influences are responsible for such destructive behaviour.

... The rough manner of childbirth, the infant's mixed experience with parents, the constricting, destructive influence of our educational system, the injustice of our distribution of wealth, our cultivated prejudices against individuals who are different – all these elements and many others warp the human organism in directions which are antisocial. (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990b:238)

Where a person follows such a destructive course, Rogers maintains that the fault must be sought in the environment, and that healing takes place in an understanding, accepting atmosphere. Rollo May's (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990b:241) response to this is interesting:

You write about 'the destructive influence of our educational system, the injustice of our distribution of wealth'. But who is responsible for this destructive influence and injustice, except you and me and people like us?

For Rollo May, one of the greatest existentialists of our time, it therefore remains vitally important to acknowledge the evil side of human nature, while for Rogers the answer is still the creation of a growth-promoting climate in which the constructive nature of the individual can unfold.

Rogers' basic assumptions appear to work superbly well in one-to-one relationships and in small groups, but larger social groupings are apparently more problematic. Hence Rogers' attempts, during the last 15 years of his life, to become involved with forces of conflict in the broader international arena in order to learn more about such contexts. In South Africa, he worked with small groups in the hope that this would lead to the formation of more and more groups that would ultimately make a difference to the whole. However, Rogers himself admits (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990b:254): 'There is much I don't understand about some evil behaviors.'

Enrichment

A member of a self-protection unit in Katlehong, whose assumed name is Tembo, says of his routine work as a murderer: 'I don't think about it. It doesn't bother me, because the situation is like this, if we kill that particular person ... it's like ... for me it's like killing a chicken, because I don't see any reason why he should live if he doesn't understand what the will of the people is ... what it is we're fighting for. (*Beeld*, 13 January 1994; own translation.)

A young Protestant woman who participated in one of Rogers' groups in Belfast (Kirschenbaum and Henderson, 1990b:254) said: 'If a wounded IRA man were lying before me on the street, I would step on him!' According to Rogers, this embittered woman was able, after only 16 hours in a warm, accepting atmosphere, to co-operate with her Catholic adversaries. Rogers would probably have felt that Tembo should also have been given the opportunity to feel fully accepted and understood so that his constructive nature could surface.

Self-evaluation question

What can Rogers' theory teach us about the possible curbing of aggression or violence?

12.10 Evaluation of the theory

What contribution does Rogers' theory make to the better understanding and improvement of human functioning?

There is no doubt that Rogers' theory has had a great influence in many areas. In some circles Rogers enjoyed such standing that he became a kind of magical figure and his theory, which is in itself idealistic, took on a mystical character. A question that is often posed is whether the theory would have had such a great impact had it not been for the extraordinary person behind it. Anyone who has had the privilege of observing Rogers working in a therapeutic situation would probably agree that mere contact with such an extraordinary person probably contributed towards the success.

The tremendous contribution of his thinking and approach to therapeutic psychology is beyond question. His principles are applied worldwide, sometimes in collaboration with other approaches. In the South African context where respect for gender, sexual and cultural differences is of the essence, the value of the person-centred approach is beyond dispute. His opening up of the process of therapy to research has led to many insights and improvements to the Rogerian method and many researchers have been influenced to think and research more critically. Rogers' emphasis on the search for a deeper understanding of human functioning serves as an encouragement to researchers who want to use the newer, qualitative research methods.

One of Rogers' most important contributions is his emphasis on the person and subjective experience as the focal point, in contrast with psychoanalysts who emphasise the unconscious process, and behaviourists who focus on the role of external environmental influences.

It is often said that Rogers sees people as exceptionally free – as beings who can take decisions and direct their own lives. The question remains, however, as to whether all people are as free as Rogers would have it because everybody must meet conditions to obtain positive regard and their decisions are consequently based to a large extent on the values of others and not their own. In the final analysis, it seems that people are not as free as Rogers believed, all being determined to some extent by environmental factors. Note, too, the role played by environmental determinants in Rogers' explanation of aggression.

Furthermore, the freedom of individuals is limited by their inherent potential – they cannot become more than their potential allows. What the optimism of Rogers' theory seems to boil down to in reality is that it allows for dynamic change, freeing the individual to overcome the problems of the past in an atmosphere of unconditional positive regard, either in everyday life or in therapy, if necessary.

The basic assumption on which Rogers' approach rests is the proposition that humans are inherently good or, at least, that they are predisposed to carry out constructive choices. Although therapists who adhere to the client-centred approach are criticised for not confronting negative, hostile and aggressive feelings (Raskin cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990b), Rogers does acknowledge the existence of negative, destructive feelings like aggression and anger. But he believes that needs, such as the need for love, are just as strong, and that humans are capable of striving towards actualising their potential in a constructive way, and living together in harmony.

This, naturally, is possible only if all people can be accepted unconditionally and can therefore be open to all their experiences, so that a society of fully functioning people can come into being. Whether such an ideal society is possible remains a moot point. Rogers (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990b) admits that there were times, during some of his international workshops, when frustration and fury reigned supreme and he would feel unsure that his trust in group members to use their power constructively would be vindicated. And yet, later feedback from participants indicated that they had had a positive learning experience.

Some concepts in Rogers' theory are difficult to define operationally and therefore difficult to verify. It is noteworthy that the theory focuses on the congruence between self-concept and organismic potential but that researchers concentrate on the discrepancy between the self-concept and the ideal self-concept. This is probably because it is difficult to measure potential but not to measure the ideal self-concept.

Applying Rogers' theoretical principles to everyday life can also be a problem. The theory presupposes, for instance, that people in day-to-day life should be unconditionally accepted by others just as a therapist accepts his or her client in therapy. Such an expectation in practice is difficult to meet. Imagine how much easier it would be to accept, say, a criminal as a person on a one-to-one basis in therapy than to accept him or her unconditionally in society. One wonders whether conditions of worth are not a prerequisite for societal living.

Rogers' distinction between rejection of behaviour and rejection of the person can also be problematic in reality, as mothers with naughty children will testify!

In education, although the person-centred approach might sound rather idealistic, it does offer valuable principles to teachers. Putting the teacher back into teaching as a person rather than as an imparter of knowledge and relying on the individual's ability to make constructive choices is of particular value in the present computer era, where the role and function of educators appear to be diminishing and self-study is becoming more and more commonplace.

In summary, we can therefore say that Rogers' theory made a particularly valuable contribution in focusing people's attention on human worth and potential. He also made the process of therapy accessible to research, thereby creating greater scope for investigation, change and growth. Even though psychotherapists use a wide range of approaches, the prerequisites Rogers identified for a growth-promoting climate continue to serve as a basis for most therapeutic contexts.

Enrichment

At the Person-Centred European (PCE) Conference held in Rome in 2010 Jeffrey Cornelius-White from Missouri, Renate Motschnig-Pitrik from Vienna and Michael Lux from Germany decided that it was necessary to show the world in how many areas Carl Rogers' ideas crystallise into helpful approaches and serve as a scientific foundation which keeps on evolving. This resulted in the publication of *The Interdisciplinary Handbook of the Person-Centred Approach: Research and Theory* in 2013, of which they are the editors. The book has many authors from all over the world and is aimed at exploring the contributions of PCA in inter-connection and resonance with other approaches or disciplines.

Different sections of the book link the Person-Centred Approach (PCA) to Cognitive and Neuro-Science; Mindfulness; Developmental Relating; Positive Psychology; Systems Theory; Research Approaches; Philosophy and Spirituality.

Activity

Apply Rogers' theory to the South African context. What would the value of Rogers' ideas be for improving interpersonal relationships in the South African context? State reasons for your view.

Self-evaluation questions

- After having studied Carl Rogers' theory, how would you explain his ideas about human functioning in a nutshell?
- Can Rogers' theory help us to improve our understanding of our own functioning and that of others?

12.11 Suggested reading

Cornelius-White, JHD, Motschnig-Pitrik, R and Lux, M (eds.) (2013). *Interdisciplinary Handbook of the Person-Centred Approach: Research and Theory*. New York: Springer Science & Business Media.

Grobler, H, Schenk, R and Mbedzi, P (2013). *Person-Centred Facilitation: Process, Theory and Practice*. (4th ed.) Oxford University Press, Southern Africa.

Kirschenbaum, H (1979). *On becoming Carl Rogers*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Kirschenbaum, H and Henderson, VL (eds.) (1990a). *The Carl Rogers reader*. London: Constable.

Kirschenbaum, H and Henderson, VL (eds.) (1990b). *Carl Rogers dialogues*. London: Constable.

Mearns, D, Thorne, B and McLeod, J (2013). *Person-Centred Counselling* (4th ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Rogers, CR (1951). *Client-centered therapy*. London: Constable.

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Rogers, CR (1972). *Becoming partners: Marriage and its alternatives*. New York: Delacorte.

Rogers, CR (1977). *Carl Rogers on personal power*. London: Constable.

Rogers, CR (1980). *A way of being*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.



Chapter 13

The personal construct theory of George Kelly (1905–1967)

Cora Moore and Werner Meyer

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13.1 Outcomes

- Understand why Kelly likens the functioning of human beings to that of scientists.
- Explain the philosophical assumptions of ‘constructive alternativism’, ‘pragmatism’ and ‘phenomenology’ which underlie Kelly’s theory.
- Explain the nature and functioning of personal constructs.
- Explain Kelly’s views on optimal and psychopathological functioning.
- Comprehend the implications and applications of Kelly’s theory in various contexts.
- Critically evaluate Kelly’s personal construct theory.

13.2 Background

How did Kelly come to develop his unusual theory?

The theory developed by George Kelly (1905–1967) is particularly interesting because it is entirely different from any other personality theory. Kelly not only creates a totally new terminology for his description of people and their behaviour, but also uses an original and unusual model. The human being is described as a scientist: just as a scientist makes hypotheses and conducts experiments to test the validity of hypotheses, so individuals try to predict and control the events of their everyday lives.

There has been much speculation about what influences might have joined forces to produce as original a theory as Kelly’s. His early years contain no clues. He was the only child in a loving family. The family moved around frequently, however, with the result that Kelly changed schools quite often. His father was trained as a Presbyterian minister, but it seems that he spent most of his life as a farmer in Colorado and Kansas (Schultz and Schultz, 2012). Kelly himself initially studied Physics and Mathematics, but in his early twenties his interest turned to social problems. He then switched to education and achieved a Master’s degree in Educational Sociology.

Kelly (1963) reports that his first contact with psychology, in the form of a number of lectures on stimulus-response psychology and, later, one of Freud’s works, which he ‘tried to read’, was disappointing. It was only many years later, during a visit to Scotland, that he developed an intense interest in psychology, for reasons which, unfortunately, he never revealed (Schultz and Schultz, 2012). In 1931, he obtained a Doctorate in Psychology in Iowa. He started a career at Fort Hays College in Kansas as a lecturer, and subsequently became a professor in Psychology. During this time, he set up a clinical psychology service for students and scholars, and it was apparently chiefly in this context that he developed his theory.

It is interesting to note that his clients were, by and large, not seriously disturbed, and it seems probable that the academic environment in which they functioned inclined them towards discussing their problems in rational, intellectual terms

(Schultz and Schultz, 2012). It may well be that this circumstance, together with his early training in mathematics and his contempt for psychoanalytical and stimulus-response psychology, led Kelly to concentrate on people's cognitive transactions with the world and to avoid concepts such as emotions and motivation.



George Kelly
Source: Public domain

Although Kelly was never trained as a psychoanalyst, in his early career he interpreted his clients' behaviour according to the Freudian approach. Gradually, however, he came to the conclusion that the accuracy of his interpretations was of less importance than the simple fact that the interpretations encouraged his clients to see their problems in a new way (Kelly, 1963:62). He further concluded that his clients' problems arose from the way they interpreted the circumstances of their lives, and that his re-interpretations could motivate them to see things differently – even though his interpretations may have been no better or truer than their own, and even in cases where his interpretations were deliberately somewhat absurd. Kelly generalised from this insight relating to his therapeutic work to the behaviour of normal individuals, and from this base built up his personal construct theory of personality (Neimeyer, 1985).

Self-evaluation question

- Kelly's life experiences exposed him to many different contexts and allowed him to see the world from different perspectives. Could this have influenced his theory and his approach to therapy? Explain. (Remember he tried to introduce his clients to 'new ways of seeing' – to re-interpret events/circumstances.)

Enrichment

To prevent confusion, we should mention that Kelly's personality theory is sometimes also described as a *cognitive theory*. It does not, however, form part of the study field known as *cognitive psychology*, although there are certain points of similarity. Both cognitive psychology and Kelly's theory rest on the assumption that cognitive processes play an important role in human behaviour, but cognitive psychology is concerned with the – mainly experimental – study of human processes of knowing, such as *observing, imagining, learning, concept formation* and *information processing*. Cognitive psychologists try to replicate some of these processes artificially with the assistance of computers – a field known as *artificial intelligence*. In the context of Kelly's personality theory, 'cognitive' refers to the individual's construction of the world using a system of dichotomous constructs, which we shall explain later.

Kelly presents his theory in the form of a *fundamental postulate* with a sequence of eleven supplementary *corollaries* (Kelly, 1963). The fundamental postulate, as well as the supplementary corollaries, appear in the table below and the second column of the table provides a brief explanation of each postulate. In the sections that follow we repeatedly refer to the appropriate corollaries, so it is advisable to refer to this table while reading the rest of the chapter. (The corollaries, with their numbers, are provided in brackets in the text.) Note, however, that we do not necessarily follow the order in which Kelly set out the corollaries.

Table 13.1 Kelly's fundamental postulate and supplementary corollaries
Source: Kelly (1955b)

Formulation		
	Fundamental postulate	A person's processes are psychologically channelised by the way in which he or she anticipates events.
1.	Construction corollary	A person anticipates events by construing replications thereof.
2.	Individuality corollary	People differ from one another in their construction of events.
3.	Organisation corollary	Each person characteristically evolves for his or her convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs .
4.	Dichotomy corollary finite	A person's construction system is composed of a number of dichotomous constructs.
5.	Range corollary	A construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only.
6.	Elaborative choice corollary	A person chooses for himself or herself that alternative in a dichotomous construct through which he or she anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his or her systems.
7.	Experience corollary	A person's construction system varies as he or she successively construes the replication of events.
8.	Modulation corollary	The variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of convenience the variants lie.
9.	Fragmentation corollary	A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially irreconcilable with each other.
10.	Commonality corollary	To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his or her processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person.
11.	Sociality corollary	To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he or she may play a role in a social process involving the other person.

KEY TERMS

construction system: the cognitive system used to predict and control events

constructs: cognitive representations of aspects of reality

dichotomous (or bi-polar): constructs consist of two opposite poles

Enrichment

In his book, *Nine lenses on the World: The Enneagram Perspective*, Jerome Wagner (2010) goes through a few of Kelly's corollaries and traces how they show up in the Enneagram styles (representing specific paradigms or worldviews.)

13.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

Which basic assumptions about human beings and their functioning underlie Kelly's theory?

Kelly focuses on human *functioning* rather than on human *nature*. He believes that people function like scientists who ask questions, formulate hypotheses, test them, draw conclusions and amend or expand the hypotheses where necessary in order to predict future events more accurately. The following simple everyday example illustrates human functioning in these terms.

Example

Sally goes to the flower market to buy a bunch of flowers. She chooses proteas, since she hypothesises that they are long-lasting and will match her colour scheme at home. If the flowers indeed beautify her home in the way she anticipated and do last long, it is likely that she will buy them again in future. If, however, she discovers that their colours are too dull, she might go for something brighter in future.



People choose between alternatives based on their anticipation of future events.

Source: Africaimages. iStock Photo

The essence of Kelly's view of the person as a scientist is expressed in his *Fundamental Postulate* (or basic assumption) which reads as follows:

A person's processes are psychologically channelised by the way in which he or she anticipates or predicts events. (Kelly, 1963:47)

Every word in this postulate has been selected carefully and must therefore be understood clearly.

- *Person* refers to the whole person, not just certain parts or processes.
- The term *processes* is used instead of 'behaviour' and is chosen to indicate that the human being is a dynamic, active organism, and not a static object that needs to be moved to action by motives such as drives or needs.
- *Psychologically* conveys the idea that Kelly's theory is applied within a psychological framework and is not aimed at explaining, say, physiological or sociological phenomena.
- *Channelised* indicates that human behaviour (or 'processes', as Kelly calls it) does not take place in a vacuum, but in a flexible network of paths created by the construction system and constructs (these are explained in more detail later on). This channelising both facilitates and limits behaviour.
- *Ways* indicates that the paths in which an individual's processes are channelised are the outcome of the person's own deliberate choices: they are a means to an end (Kelly, 1963:49).

- The words *he or she* highlight the fact that the individual's chosen ways of acting may not be perfect or ideal ways of acting.
- The phrase *anticipates events* refers to the essence of Kelly's view of humankind: human beings are oriented towards the future in that, like a scientist, they try to predict what is actually going to happen.

This makes it clear that Kelly describes humans as scientists whose existence consists essentially of trying to predict and control events in their environment. This occurs by means of a set of concepts or constructs that each person develops individually. Kelly calls this set of constructs a *construction system* (the **construction corollary**, corollary 1 in Table 13.1). He says individuals use it to classify the objects and events in the world around them, to interpret them, to make predictions on the basis of their interpretations, and then to test whether the predictions are correct.

KEY TERM

teleological:
future-oriented

Kelly therefore adopts a **teleological** (future-oriented) position on people's basic functioning: People do not go through life without goal or direction, but are constantly and actively engaged in improving the cognitive system they use to make their predictions.

Enrichment

Kelly points out an interesting contradiction in the behaviour of most psychologists (most of whom were, at that time, behaviouristically-oriented researchers): while they regard themselves as scientists whose general aim is to understand, interpret, predict and control the behaviour of their subjects, they are not willing to see their subjects and clients as being similarly bent on trying to understand, interpret, predict and control their lives and environments. It is as though the psychologist says to himself or herself (Kelly 1963:5): 'I, being a psychologist, and therefore a scientist, am performing this experiment in order to improve the prediction and control of certain human phenomena; but my subject, being merely a human organism, is obviously propelled by inexorable drives welling up within him, or else he is in gluttonous pursuit of sustenance and shelter'.

KEY TERMS

constructive alternativism:
there is no such thing as a single 'true' conception of the world – the world can be seen and interpreted in different ways

pragmatism: people choose constructs that 'work'

phenomenology:
the philosophical view that assumes that the individual's only access to external reality is his or her subjective knowledge and experience of reality

Self-evaluation question

- Why does Kelly liken the functioning of human beings to that of scientists? Explain.

What is Kelly's philosophical position?

Kelly's model of the individual as a scientist must be seen against the background of, in particular, three philosophical points of departure, namely **constructive alternativism**, **pragmatism** and **phenomenology**. These are explained below.

13.3.1 Constructive alternativism

The first, and probably most important, principle is the one that Kelly himself called *constructive alternativism*. Kelly asserts that there is no such thing as a single 'true' conception of the world, but that the world can be seen and interpreted in

different ways – as he puts it, the world can be construed in ‘alternative’ ways. Man is therefore not a prisoner of his own or any other interpretation of the world. Kelly also stresses that interpretations have meaning in time and that what is valid at one point in time could be false at a later time (Feist, Feist & Roberts, 2013).

Kelly explains his viewpoint as follows (1963:15):

We assume that all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement. This is a basic statement which has a bearing upon almost everything that we shall have to say later. We take this stand that there are always some alternative constructions available to choose among in dealing with the world. No one needs to paint himself into a corner; no one needs to be completely hemmed in by circumstances; no one needs to be the victim of his biography.

13.3.2 Pragmatism

If the world can be interpreted in different ways, on what basis does a person choose certain constructs while rejecting others? Here Kelly is in agreement with John Dewey’s *pragmatism* and asserts that people choose constructs that ‘work’. People therefore choose constructs because they predict accurately and not because they coincide with reality. Thus, according to Kelly, individuals’ basic motivation – their striving to understand, predict and control – has as its ultimate goal the development of an efficient construction system that will work in their particular situations. If this ceases to be the case, individuals will be inclined to change their construction systems.

13.3.3 Phenomenology

Kelly’s third philosophical point of departure is that the individual’s only access to external reality is his or her *subjective knowledge* and experience of reality. While Kelly does acknowledge the existence of an objective reality, he believes that we do not know reality as it is, but know it only via our constructions (that is, interpretations) of it. Just as we are able to see only certain colours because the eye can only receive those particular light waves, our constructs enable us to know certain aspects of reality and not others.

As a phenomenologist, Kelly has no wish to establish whether, or to what extent, individuals’ experience corresponds with reality. For him, the ‘real’ appearance of the world is simply less important than the individual’s interpretation and subjective experience of it. It follows from this that Kelly’s theory, research and therapeutic system are not aimed at establishing what the ‘real’ or objective world of the individual looks like, but rather at determining how he or she perceives and interprets that world subjectively.

Enrichment

Kelly’s view on the perception of reality is more or less in agreement with Immanuel Kant’s *critical realism*, according to which individuals can know the world only through their knowledge categories. Kelly’s view differs from that of Kant in that Kant regards the knowledge categories as inborn, while Kelly maintains that constructs are created by individuals themselves, and can be changed by those individuals.

Self-evaluation question

- Explain the following three philosophical points of departure that underlie Kelly's theory: *constructive alternativism*, *pragmatism* and *phenomenology*.

13.4 The structure of the personality

According to Kelly, which structural elements do human beings use to predict and control events and how are these elements organised?

For Kelly, the essence of personality is the cognitive system which the individual uses to predict and control events. He calls this a *construction system* rather than a 'construct system', thereby emphasising that it is a working and changing system that is of the individual's own making, and not something that actually exists in objective reality in some final, unchanging form. This places the *process of construing*, rather than the system as such, in the foreground.

13.4.1 Structural properties of the construction system

Kelly does not explain the structure of the construction system explicitly or in much detail. All that he actually says about it is that there are **ordinal relationships** between constructs (**organisation corollary**, corollary 3), and that the system comprises a number of (irreconcilable) subsystems (**fragmentation corollary**, corollary 9).

KEY TERM

ordinal relationships: hierarchically arranged constructs within the construction system

Ordinal relationships between constructs

The constructs in the individual's construction system are hierarchically arranged, which means that the system comprises *superordinate* and *subordinate* constructs. A superordinate construct is comprehensive in that it incorporates other constructs as elements. These are called **subordinate constructs**. In our example of Sally who wants to beautify her home, the construct *beautiful* versus *ugly* can be regarded as a *superordinate construct* (the bi-polar nature of constructs will be explained later). When Sally considers beautiful things that she can use to make her home more attractive, a whole range of *subordinate constructs* becomes available. Since Sally regards matching colours as beautiful and colours that clash as ugly, this subordinate construct can come into play when choosing something beautiful. The something beautiful could be beautiful modern furniture which could replace her ugly old furniture, or she could simply buy fresh flowers (which she regards as beautiful) and not artificial flowers (which she regards as ugly). Obviously a person's construction system could include many constructs and combinations of constructs and these would be organised in a unique way for each individual. The following diagram (Figure 13.1) represents an over-simplified version of ordinal (hierarchical) relationships in Sally's construction system. The construct poles she chooses are indicated in bold type.

KEY TERM

subordinate constructs: elements of more comprehensive superordinate constructs

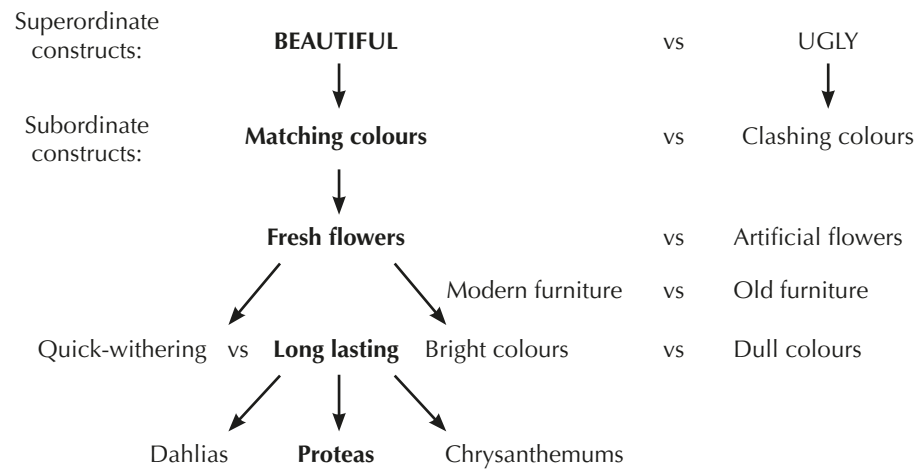


Figure 13.1 Hierarchical, ordinal relationships between constructs
Source: Moore (2016)

Concentric relationships between constructs

KEY TERM

concentric relationships: refers to the distinction between central (core) constructs and peripheral (less important) constructs

Concentric relationships refer to the distinction between *central* and *peripheral* constructs. According to one of Kelly's best-known students, Sechrest (1983:251), central or core constructs are important for the individual's maintenance of himself or herself as a person, while peripheral constructs have only marginal implications for self-maintenance. It follows that core constructs cannot readily be changed, because any change to them would necessitate changes throughout the construction system. The distinction between central and peripheral constructs is especially relevant for the parts of the construction system concerned with the person's self-perception and his or her views about relationships with other people. In our example where Sally makes choices regarding ways to beautify her home, the subordinate construct 'quick-withering versus long-lasting' flowers, is a peripheral construct, because it is linked with a relatively small number of other constructs and is not important for Sally's self-perception or self-maintenance. However, if Sally were to choose between obtaining beautiful things in an 'honest versus dishonest' way, a central or core construct would be involved. Such a central construct would be linked with a large number of other constructs involving behaviours that are linked to her beliefs and values.

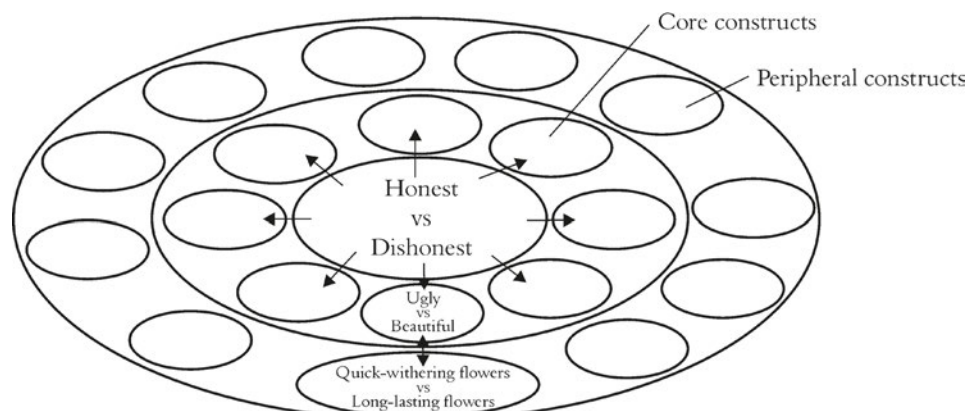


Figure 13.2 Concentric relationships between constructs
Source: Moore (2016)

Although it cannot be regarded as an absolute rule, central constructs are more likely to be superordinate, whereas peripheral constructs are usually subordinate in terms of the ordinal (hierarchical) relationship between constructs.

The construction system comprises subsystems

The construction systems of individuals are constantly changing as they confront new events and aspects of the world. Some parts of the construction system may therefore develop differently from other parts, and people will thus develop *different construct subsystems for different contexts* of their lives. These subsystems may be partly consistent with one another, but may differ in other respects, and may even include inconsistencies.

Example

Sally, who is a lecturer, may use one way of construing when she is choosing something to beautify her home, but she may use different characteristic ways of construing when she is doing research in her subject, when she is relaxing with friends, when she is with her family, when she is interacting with students and – if she happens to be prejudiced – even in the way she deals with male and female students. This can lead to inconsistent behaviour because she may use different subsystems in different situations and contexts (Kelly, 1963:87).

Although, as a rule, people strive to develop a single, comprehensive system which contains no inconsistencies or irreconcilable discrepancies, this ideal is never entirely realised (Kelly, 1963:57). A person's construction system must, therefore, be seen as consisting of various parts or subsystems which can function in a number of different ways and which may even be contradictory. It is not at any point in time a completely logical, well-organised framework, as would be the case with a good scientific theory. There is thus always the possibility that a construction system will include irreconcilable parts.

Self-evaluation questions

- Discuss the ordinal and concentric relations between constructs. Using examples, explain how each one of these relations emerges in human behaviour.
- How do irreconcilable subsystems develop within the construction system?

13.4.2 The properties of constructs

In order to understand how constructs are used to interpret, anticipate and predict events, it is important to be informed about the specific properties of constructs.

Constructs as dichotomous classifications

Constructs are cognitive representations of aspects of reality. Kelly insists that constructs are *dichotomous* or *bipolar*. The reason Kelly (1963) gives for his insistence is that dichotomous thinking has met with considerable success in other branches of science, such as electro-magnetics (electricity is understood as a flow of current between positive and negative poles). This means that a construct

consists of two opposites, such as intelligent–stupid, beautiful–ugly or man–woman. Constructs are used to make predictions by classifying objects or an anticipated event into one of the two opposing categories. When using the construct intelligent–stupid, therefore, one might classify another person either as intelligent or as stupid, and one would then have certain expectations of his or her behaviour.

Because constructs are always and necessarily of a dichotomous nature, this, *inter alia*, implies that a person's constructs can be understood by someone else only if both poles are known. A reference to 'red', for example, may mean different things depending on whether the person is using it in the context of colour (with 'green' as the opposite pole), or in a political context (with 'capitalist' as the opposite pole), or in an interpersonal context (where the opposite pole could be 'not self-conscious').

It should be noted that the words used to describe the two poles of a construct need not mean the same to different people. Two people might both make use of a construct that they label as loyal–disloyal, but might nevertheless mean different things.

It also needs to be kept in mind that Kelly does not see constructs as consisting of a range of possibilities distributed between two poles. They are, rather, classifications that permit only one of two extremes. Kelly does not, therefore, regard a construct such as intelligent–stupid as consisting of two extremes with different levels of intelligence in between, but as something which permits only a distinction between intelligent and stupid. The individual can, however, distinguish between people with different levels of intelligence by making use of various constructs.

Example

A teacher confronted with 20 students of varying levels of intelligence might use the construct intelligent–stupid to classify the three most intelligent students as intelligent and all the rest as stupid. He or she might then further distinguish between the three bright students by using other constructs such as 'brilliant' versus 'of ordinary intelligence' or 'bright enough to be sure of achieving a few distinctions' versus 'clever enough to achieve a couple of distinctions provided he or she works hard'.

Clearly, a full understanding of someone's constructs and construction system would require an in-depth study in order to find out what both poles of the construct are, how it links with other constructs, and to see it in the context of the person's behaviour.

Constructs may be verbal or non-verbal

The two contrasting alternatives of a construct are not necessarily expressed by means of *verbal* labels. They can also take the form of subjective impressions that may be difficult to communicate, as when someone classifies events according to a distant, *non-verbalised* memory reaching back into childhood. For example, a construct may consist of the vague idea that something is 'like the thing that used to make my father so angry versus *not* like that thing'. We probably all use constructs for classifying smells or kinds of pain which have some meaning to us, but which we could not easily convey to anyone else because they are not associated with words in our minds.

Constructs may be comprehensive or incidental

A *comprehensive construct* has a broad range or scope, which means that it is applicable to a broad set of elements, whereas an *incidental construct* has only a limited range. (The events to which a construct is relevant are called *elements*, and the totality of relevant elements is referred to as the *scope* or *context* of the construct (Sechrest, 1983:250).) The construct good–bad as used by most people is a comprehensive construct because a great variety of elements or events can be classified in terms of it. Conversely, a construct such as ‘my blue jersey versus my brown jersey’ is incidental because it has a bearing on a single set of elements only.

Regardless of the nature of a person’s constructs, he or she will at any given moment have only a finite number of constructs at his or her disposal, each of which will be relevant to a more or less limited range of phenomena (**range corollary**, corollary 5). This implies that there will always be certain things in the world that individuals are unable to predict because they do not fall within the scope or range of their construction systems, or have no relevance to it.

Constructs may be permeable or impermeable

A construct is used in a permeable way (or has permeable boundaries) when new elements are readily brought within its parameters.

Example

When a person is prepared to evaluate circumstances that she has not come across before in terms of a particular construct (for example, friendly–unfriendly), she is using the construct in a *permeable* manner. But when she takes the view that people today are no longer friendly and is not prepared to classify the new people she meets as friendly, she would be using the construct in an *impermeable* manner because she would not be permitting any new elements at the ‘friendly’ pole of the construct – everyone she meets would automatically be categorised as ‘unfriendly’.

Although Kelly does not say so explicitly, it can be inferred that an impermeable construct has only one impermeable pole. A construct with two impermeable poles would be entirely dysfunctional and would be eliminated from the construction system.

Constructs may be tight or loose

A construct is used in a *tight way* when it always leads to the same prediction. If someone were always to predict from the construct man–woman that men are unfriendly and women friendly, he or she would be using the construct in a tight manner. For this person, the constructs man–woman and friendly–unfriendly are unalterably bound together. The tight use of constructs is associated with consistent and even rigid attitudes, while using them loosely can be associated with flexibility and pliancy, but sometimes also with inconsistency and confusion.

The difference between Kelly’s two constructs, permeable–impermeable and tight–loose, is that the former is concerned with classification of elements or events, while the latter has to do with the underlying relationship between constructs.

In effect, however, impermeable constructs and tight constructs lead to virtually the same type of rigid functioning.

Constructs may be pre-emptive, constellatory or propositional

Propositional construing is the opposite of *pre-emptive* and of *constellatory* construing.

A construct is used in a *pre-emptive* way when certain other constructs can consequently not be used. This means that pre-emptive construing inhibits alternative ways of construing. Sechrest (1983:252) points out that the construct enemy-friend is often used pre-emptively during a time of war. At such a time, someone who is classified as an enemy is not also classified as a human, such as a father, an employee or a music lover: ‘He is the enemy, and that is it.’ When a person uses a construct pre-emptively, he or she obliges himself or herself to choose one of its two alternative poles and to act accordingly, without allowing himself or herself to consider other alternatives.

The *propositional use* of constructs allows people to construe the elements encompassed by their constructs in various ways, pending additional information. When people construe events in such a way that their final conclusion depends on the circumstances rather than on a conclusion that they have already reached at a superordinate level, they are using their constructs in a propositional manner. This kind of construing would, for example, enable a person to reason along these lines: ‘Even though this man belongs to the ranks of the enemy, it is still possible that he could be a good, friendly sort of person; he may have just the same kind of feelings as I have. Let’s see if I can find out what sort of person he really is.’ Propositional construing, therefore, is associated with flexible, pliant thinking, and is usually more appropriate in interpersonal situations than pre-emptive construing. It is also more useful in developing scientific theories.

A construct is used in a *constellatory* manner when it determines a certain construction of its elements, or, in other words, when subordinate constructs are strongly associated with superordinate constructs. Constellatory construing therefore automatically entails a certain structure or constellation of further construing. When a person uses the construct man–woman in such a way that classifying someone as ‘woman’ also classifies her as ‘stupid’, ‘superficial’ and ‘childish’, we have an instance of constellatory construing. This method of construing is linked with rigid thinking, prejudice and stereotyping.

Self-evaluation questions

- How do the properties of constructs influence the process of construing?
- Explain four different ways in which constructs can be used in a flexible and a rigid manner.

Activity

Think about your functioning during the past hour. Apply Kelly’s theory to describe your functioning. Which constructs did you use? Do you think your way of construing is flexible? If yes, why? If not, why not? Give reasons for your answers.

13.5 The dynamics of the personality

How does Kelly explain the dynamics of the personality?

Put differently, what is the *driving or motivating force* behind behaviour and how do the constructs in the construction system ‘work together’ to determine the person’s functioning?

13.5.1 The basic motive: Predicting behaviour

According to Kelly, humans are constantly working towards the goal of predicting and controlling their environment, and are always attempting to improve their construction systems, so that it is unnecessary to propose any further motivating factors such as internal drives or external stimuli that ‘push or pull them’ (Kelly, 1963:37). For Kelly, the human is by nature a teleological (future-oriented) being for whom the successful anticipation of events is a satisfying experience (Maddi, 1989:168; Rychlak, 1981:721).

According to Kelly, therefore, a human being’s basic motive is to predict events correctly (*fundamental postulate*) and to improve his or her construction system (**elaborative choice**, corollary 6).

13.5.2 Human functioning in general: The process of construing

While Kelly explores the properties of constructs and the construction system in detail, he is far less specific about how the system functions as a whole. His overall proposition is clear: people evaluate events with the help of their constructs and construction systems, make predictions about what is going to happen on the basis of this evaluation, and behave accordingly. It is, nevertheless, remarkably difficult to formulate a precise idea of how the system functions in everyday life. The scenario presented in the following example is an attempt to ‘read between the lines’ of Kelly’s theory and apply it to an everyday event.

Example

An episode in the life of Joe Smith

While travelling by train from Cape Town to Bloemfontein, Joe Smith is sharing his compartment with a stranger. He automatically begins to assess the stranger by means of his construction system, which determines what he observes and how he judges it. If, for example, he has no construct ‘qualified meteorologist versus unqualified meteorologist’, it may escape his notice that the thick book the stranger is reading is entitled *Advanced Meteorology*. He would probably make use of constructs such as ‘sociable–unsociable’ and ‘friendly–surly’ quite early on in the process and, on the basis of the frown on the man’s face, he might decide that the stranger is unsociable and surly. (In other words, the part of his construction system that he is using at that moment leads Joe to predict that a man who frowns is unsociable and surly.) His next step is to test his

prediction by saying nothing. The stranger is also silent, which confirms Joe's prediction. However, after a while, the stranger takes a bottle of whisky out of his suitcase and offers Joe a swig. This comes as a surprise to Joe. He experiences some anxiety, and is now obliged to construe the situation somewhat differently. He must search his construction system (in other words, engage in some circumspection, see 13.5.3) until he finds a construct that seems appropriate. His reasoning may now proceed as follows: 'Either he is an alcoholic or he is not; if the former, he may become angry if I don't join him, or it may not bother him at all; if he is not an alcoholic, then he is either a sociable chap, or he is a shy person trying to make contact; if he is sociable and I don't take him up, he will either insist or find another way of striking up a conversation; if he is shy and I refuse, he will either start reading again, or he'll drink his whisky and leave the compartment ...' In this short space of time, Joe might even be able to consider a few more constructs, but he must quickly take some action. According to Kelly, Joe's behaviour will be directed at improving his construction system, either by *expanding* it or by *defining* it more accurately. If Joe wanted to expand his construction system, he might decide to accept the offer in order to consider additional hypotheses and develop new constructs. If, on the other hand, he wanted to define his system (that is, to establish the validity of his existing constructs), he might decide to refuse so that he could try to test a specific hypothesis.

According to the **construction corollary** (corollary 1) a person anticipates or predicts events by construing replications thereof. This process of construing is essentially a process whereby the individual abstracts the recurring or similar aspects of (past and present) events and uses them to anticipate similar future events (Kelly, 1963:50–53).

Example

An individual – let's call him John Kambule – may notice that certain people in his environment (such as his mother, his older sister and others) are similar to one another in some respects and different from other people (such as his father, one of his aunts and some strangers). For example, the people in the first group might radiate a certain kind of friendliness, while those in the second group might come across as cold and aloof. John may then abstract this in the form of a construct such as 'motherly–unfeeling', and use it to anticipate future encounters with people, in other words, to predict how the people he meets will behave.

Note that the individual's interpretation does not necessarily have to correspond with 'reality'. Other people may not observe the same similarities and differences between the people concerned. Whatever the case, this is a process of construing results in the formulation of dichotomous constructs and their eventual organisation into one or more hierarchical systems. (The way in which constructs are formed is explained in greater detail in 13.6.1.)

13.5.3 Ways in which the construction system functions

Besides explaining in general terms what construing comprises, Kelly's theory furnishes surprisingly few details regarding human functioning. In fact, he describes only two further specific processes to add to our understanding of how the construction system enables people to function. These two processes are the *circumspection–pre-emption–control cycle* and the *creativity cycle*.

KEY TERM

C–P–C cycle:
circumspection–pre-emption–control cycle

The circumspection–pre-emption–control cycle

Individuals use the **circumspection–pre-emption–control cycle (C–P–C cycle)** when they find themselves in unfamiliar situations in which they have various options. As the term suggests, individuals first search for an appropriate construct (this involves circumspection in their construction systems), decide upon a given construct (make a pre-emptive choice), and then establish whether or not their anticipation was correct (thereby monitoring or bringing the process under control).

In the first step, *circumspection*, individuals search their construction systems for constructs that could be appropriate to the situation and could therefore help them decide what to do. They may use several constructs at the same time, or sequentially, in a propositional way (that is, they ask themselves: ‘What would happen if ...?’), and in this way they see the situation from a number of different viewpoints (Kelly, 1955:1061). They do not, at this point, decide on a plan of action.

The second step, *pre-emption*, involves deciding what construct they should use. This means they decide what the actual issue is, or what their choices are (Kelly, 1955:1061). (The term ‘pre-emption’ goes back to the Middle Ages, and refers to the right of privileged persons to buy goods before they were made available to the general public. Its meaning is therefore more or less equivalent to ‘advance booking’, and the effect of pre-emption in this situation is to exclude the use of other constructs, at least for the time being.) An example often used here is that of Hamlet who, after lengthy deliberation, came to the conclusion: ‘To be or not to be, that is the question.’

All the other possibilities are eliminated at this stage so that at the next stage, that of *control*, individuals have only to establish whether or not their predictions were correct. They do so by acting in terms of one of the two alternatives which they have chosen in order either to expand or to define their system (as will be explained in 13.5.4). In this way ‘behaviour’ becomes a person’s way of asking questions (Sechrest, 1983). Individuals test the accuracy of their predictions by doing something, just as scientists test the accuracy of their hypotheses by performing experiments.

Example

If a businessperson uses the construct honest–dishonest to classify a potential buyer as being honest, he or she can test this ‘hypothesis’ by granting the buyer credit. If it turns out that a prediction is incorrect, meaning that the construct chosen at the stage of pre-emption was not appropriate, the person can begin again with further circumspection and go through the cycle again, or repeatedly, until he or she has found a satisfactory solution to the problem.

The C–P–C cycle is involved in a great deal of human behaviour, as the following example demonstrates.

Example

Martha, who is a person with a relatively fixed lifestyle, asks herself, at the beginning of a weekend, what she plans to do by way of relaxation. She considers several constructs in her construction system to decide which would be most suitable in helping her find an answer to her question (she engages in circumspection); she finally concludes that the real question is whether she should take it easy or look for an energetic activity (she exercises pre-emption). Whatever her choice may be, it will lead either to a specific course of action or possibly to a further C–P–C cycle. If she decides to take it easy, she will probably stay at home, but she will still have to decide (by going through further C–P–C cycles) just how she should take things easy. If she opts for an active type of relaxation, she will undoubtedly have to go through a series of C–P–C cycles in order to decide on a specific activity.

The creativity cycle

Kelly also describes a more creative method of construing, which he calls the *creativity cycle*. What this means is that initially individuals use their constructs in a loose manner (that is, they allow new elements into their context), and later in a tight manner (that is, establishing, by means of controls, which constructs fit in or ‘work’), thereby either enlarging their construction systems or defining them. In order to clarify this, we take the previous example a step further.

Example

Martha may use the constructs which in her system are associated with relaxation in a loose manner, by adding further elements to them. If she enjoys visiting game parks, she could expand her list of game parks by reading about parks she does not know, thereby increasing the number of elements in one or more of her constructs. She might then visit one of the new game parks on her list to decide whether or not she likes it, thereby tightening one or more of her constructs by controlling or checking the correctness of her predictions.

Enrichment

In an article by Trevor Butt (2012), interesting parallels are drawn between the Genesis story of the Garden of Eden and Kelly’s construct theory.

The opposites of constructs represent the alternative actions open to us at a particular point in time. Just like in the case of Adam, the choices we make have implications and consequences and just like Adam we can make mistakes and feel ashamed! A patient of Kelly likened the shame we feel to being expelled from the Garden of Eden. Kelly returned to this theme in his later work and emphasised the **freedom** of choice we have and the resolve to act differently in the face of failure.

[Retrieved from: <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-25/edition-3/looking-back-george-kelly-and-garden-eden>]

KEY TERM

freedom: human beings have the freedom to choose their interpretation of the world and their actions

Self-evaluation question

- Explain the circumspection–pre-emption–control cycle and the creativity cycle, using examples from your own experiential world.

13.5.4 How the individual can improve his or her construction system

This matter is dealt with in corollary 6 (**elaborative choice corollary**) and is linked to the *creativity cycle* that was discussed earlier. Although the immediate goal of construing is to anticipate certain events in the near future, the underlying or long-term goal is to *improve the construction system* in order to make more accurate predictions in the long run.

This elaboration, as Kelly calls it, can take place in two ways, namely (Kelly, 1963:66–67):

- The system may be *expanded* so that it can predict more and more events.
- The system may be *defined* more accurately so that the events it already incorporates may be more and more accurately predicted.

Expanding their system can be described as *adventurous*. An individual may decide to invite her new neighbour for a cup of tea as an experiment to see whether the neighbour fits into her hypothesis that the neighbour seems to be a friendly type of person and would be well disposed towards her.

Sechrest (1983:253) says that the individual may also expand his or her system by creating or acquiring new constructs (for example, when people find bridging constructs to reconcile contradictions between their religious principles and their behaviour), or by incorporating additional elements into the context of their existing constructs (for example, when people define their religious principles more broadly in order to accommodate their behaviour).

Individuals make a conservative choice or try to define their systems more accurately when they try to give existing constructs more distinct boundaries so that they can make more reliable or exact forecasts. Unfortunately, Kelly does not explain precisely what he means by this, but it seems that definition can take place by re-testing ‘hypotheses’ that have already been proved (for example, when a person visits a good friend once again as if to make quite sure that he or she is still friendly, that his or her company is still enjoyable, that he or she can still be relied on, etcetera), or by determining exactly which subordinate constructs belong with a specific event (for example, when a person tries to find out whether a friend who is known to ‘enjoy parties’ is also willing to join an outing to a nightclub).

Sechrest (1983:253) points out a further means of defining the construction system, namely *constriction*. Individuals may, for example, eliminate or ‘scrap’ certain paragraphs of their construction systems (for example, people discard their

religious beliefs in order to get rid of conflict between these beliefs and their actual behaviour), or they may omit certain elements from the context of their constructs (for example, when someone ceases to regard a personal desire as an element in the construct sin–virtue).

Kelly does not, unfortunately, explain why or when people may decide to expand their construction systems or, conversely, to define them. Sechrest (1963:221) suggests that most people alternate between the two methods of elaboration.

13.5.5 Interpersonal relationships and interactions

One area of human functioning in which Kelly is particularly interested is *interpersonal relationships*, especially in the context of psychotherapy. Even though Kelly's explanation of exactly how the individual's construction system operates is somewhat vague and incomplete, the idea that relationships between people are largely determined by the way in which they construe the world and one another comes across clearly enough. Kelly's theory adds a great deal to our understanding of these phenomena.

In corollary 10 (**commonality corollary**), Kelly indicates that two people have similar personalities when they construe their experiences in similar ways. One implication of this is that two people who have had 'the same' experiences, in that their circumstances are the same, may nevertheless be different because they interpret the circumstances differently. Conversely, it implies also that two people may be alike even though their experiences are different, provided they interpret their experiences in a similar way (Kelly, 1963:91).

This view has important implications for the study of social behaviour and cultural differences. One could assume that people from similar cultural backgrounds are more likely to have similar construction systems, and would therefore be able to anticipate one another's behaviour more easily. When trying to understand the behaviour of a person from another culture it would therefore be important to have an understanding of the way in which people from that particular culture tend to construe events. Kelly (1963:95) does, however, make it clear that similar construction systems do not necessarily bring about understanding, co-operation or effective interaction. Also, according to his theory, it is still possible for people who come from the same cultural background to construe events differently, and for people from different cultural backgrounds to construe a particular event in a similar fashion. It therefore becomes important not only to understand broad cultural trends, but also to take individual differences into consideration when attempting to anticipate people's behaviour. As Kelly sees it, individuals can play a part in other people's lives only to the extent that they try to understand other people's thinking – that is, to the extent that they construe the process whereby other people construe (**sociality corollary**, corollary 11) (Kelly, 1963:97).

Kelly's theory poses quite a challenge to all South Africans who are part of the multicultural 'rainbow nation' and wish to play a part in each other's lives!

KEY TERMS

anxiety: occurs when one's construction system cannot deal with an event

threat: when extensive changes in the core constructs are imminent

fear: when less far-reaching changes in the core constructs are imminent

guilt: when behaviour does not tally with core role constructs

aggression: the active elaboration of the construction system

hostility: clinging to inadequate, ineffective constructs

Self-evaluation question

- In terms of Kelly's theory, how would you be able to better understand your fellow human beings?

13.5.6 Kelly's explanation of specific types of behaviour

Kelly sees his theory as a construction system that can be used to understand all behaviour from a psychological point of view. Kelly describes a number of behavioural configurations (or *personality processes*, as he calls them) that accompany changes or expected changes to the construction system, such as **anxiety**, **threat**, **fear**, **guilt**, **aggression** and **hostility**. Note, however, that he defines these concepts within the framework of his theory and consequently some of the definitions are rather odd and quite different from normal usage.

- **Anxiety**, according to Kelly, occurs when a person becomes aware that the event he or she is faced with falls outside the scope or range of his or her construction system. In other words, he or she does not have constructs to enable him or her to interpret the event properly and make predictions (Kelly, 1955a:495). The realisation that one's construction system cannot deal with an event occurs particularly when one discovers that circumspection does not produce any appropriate constructs, or when an event has been incorrectly predicted. Unfamiliar things, such as sex in the life of a chaste adolescent, school for a child of six, or death for all of us, thus create anxiety because we have no constructs with which to anticipate any related occurrences (Bannister & Fransella, 1980:32).
- **Threat**, as Kelly (1955b:565) explains, is the consequence of perceiving that one is on the brink of a comprehensive change in one's core constructs. Core constructs play a central role in individuals' handling of their world, such as constructs that have to do with basic aspects of their worldview, or with their physical security. Threat is evidently at its most extreme when core role constructs are implicated – core role constructs that are specifically bound up with individuals' pictures of themselves and their interpersonal relationships. When people see that such constructs must soon change, they feel threatened and this, in turn, can lead to hostility or a withdrawal from the situation. In extreme cases it may even bring about a psychosis (Bannister & Fransella, 1980:34). Such a reaction could occur if a therapist tried to change a client's behaviour patterns too quickly.
- **Fear** occurs as a result of realising that an incidental (that is, less comprehensive) change in one's central constructs is imminent (Kelly, 1955a:494). This is similar to threat, but less serious (Bannister & Mair, 1968:32). For example, Peter, who believes he is a good tennis player, would experience fear if he found himself in danger of losing a match, because he might have to change some constructs about his tennis skills. However, if Peter's self-evaluation rests primarily on his tennis skills, or if he is a professional tennis player who realises that he might have to face an entire career change and a loss of prestige as a result of the defeat, he would feel

‘threat’ rather than ‘fear’. The difference between the two lies therefore in the scope of the approaching change; extensive, deep-seated changes in the construction system are accompanied by feelings of threat, whereas smaller, less far-reaching changes are accompanied by fear.

- **Guilt** feelings are not linked with punishment by Kelly, but with individuals’ core role constructs, which are connected with important aspects of their view of themselves and their role in the world (Bannister & Mair, 1968:32). When individuals see that their behaviour does not tally with their core role constructs, they feel guilty. Someone with a core role construct to the effect that ‘I am an honest person, I am not a liar’, would thus feel guilty if he or she told a lie.
- **Aggression** is defined in a rather idiosyncratic way by Kelly, as the individual’s active elaboration of his or her construction system (Kelly, 1955b:874). Kelly does not associate aggression with anger or violence, but regards it purely as an active striving by individuals to expand their perceptual fields or to improve their interpretation of their world (Bannister & Mair, 1968:33). What Kelly calls aggression actually corresponds more closely with what would, in everyday language, be called curiosity or daring, or possibly a combination of the two. It is through this type of aggression that the individual breaks new ground, thereby confronting new experiences and problems and, as a consequence, having to deal with new anxieties (Kelly, 1955b:184). In terms of this definition, aggression is a positive attribute that is demonstrated by an explorer who ventures into unknown regions of the world, or by the dedicated student who asks questions and reads books on new topics (Sechrest, 1983:256).
- **Hostility**, in Kelly’s terminology, is an individual’s continued attempt to insist on extracting validating evidence for constructs that have already demonstrated their inadequacy, but which the person does not want to relinquish because this would provoke too much anxiety (Bannister & Mair, 1968:33; Sechrest, 1983:256). (We have already mentioned why relinquishing constructs provokes anxiety: by definition, any situation for which a person does not have appropriate constructs causes anxiety.) The myth of Procrustes can be taken as a prototypical example of hostility: Procrustes was convinced that any visitor he received would fit his bed, and if a guest did not fit, he would stretch them or chop off their legs until they did fit the bed and his prediction was validated. There are various hostile methods of trying to force corroboration for constructs from the environment, such as violence, bribery, or some other form of behaviour which would, in normal usage, be described as aggressive. So, for example, Mr Soni, who gets married with the expectation that his wife will submit to him in every respect, might become hostile when things do not turn out as he expects, and he therefore forces his wife to behave according to his prediction (Kelly, 1955b:874). According to Kelly, such hostility should be seen as an attempt to avoid anxiety and protect the person’s own construction system rather than as behaviour that is intended to harm the other person. (See also 13.9.3.)

Self-evaluation question

- How does Kelly explain anxiety, threat, fear, guilt feelings, aggression and hostility on the basis of his construct theory?

13.6 The development of the personality

Does Kelly formulate an explicit theory of development and does he have something to say about ideal and non-ideal development?

Kelly does not formulate an explicit theory of development. As with motivation, he regards it as so self-evident that people change throughout their lives that it is unnecessary to create specific concepts to describe the process (Sechrest, 1983:238). For Kelly, development consists simply of the formation of constructs and the expansion of the construction system.

13.6.1 The development of constructs

Kelly believes that *constructs develop as a consequence of the individual's perception of similarities and differences between events*, and that on the basis of this abstraction, the person formulates bipolar constructs which he or she uses to predict further events. Kelly is of the opinion that similarities and differences can lead to construct formation only when there are at least three events to refer to, two of which will be interpreted, in terms of a specific property, as similar to each other and one as different. It is helpful to visualise this process in terms of the following simple example:

Example

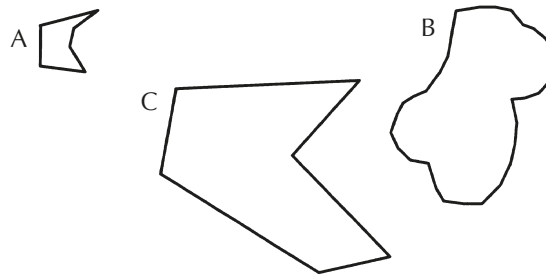


Figure 13.3 Three drawings or 'events' that can lead to the development of constructs
Source: Moore (2016)

Suppose Sindiwe is confronted with objects A and B in Figure 13.3 and that she has never before come across any similar objects. According to Kelly, she would not formulate a construct at that stage but only when also confronted with object C. She would then be able to construe two of the objects as similar and one as different in terms of a property which she regards as relevant at that point. She might, for example, group together objects A and C because she sees a similarity in that they both have rectilinear or straight boundaries. (Kelly calls this the *similarity pole* of the new construct.) Object B would then be placed at the other pole (the *contrast pole*) because it has a curvilinear or crooked boundary. Sindiwe has now formulated a new construct, namely 'straight outline versus crooked outline', which she can in future use to classify other objects. But another person confronted with the same objects might construe them differently, choosing perhaps to group B and C together in contrast with A and formulate the construct 'large versus small'.

13.6.2 The development of the individual's construction system

As has already been indicated, *the individual expands his or her construction system by formulating new constructs and incorporating new elements into existing constructs*. Unfortunately, Kelly does not explain what might cause a person's construction system to develop in a particular way or direction (Maddi, 1989:160). Only a few general characteristics of this developmental process can be indicated.

- As the person's construction system develops, the number of verbal constructs increases while non-verbal constructs decrease.
- An adult's constructs tend to be *more permeable and comprehensive* than a child's.

13.7 Optimal development

Although Kelly does not refer explicitly to the attributes of the fully-functioning individual, it is clear from what has been said previously that *optimally developed people* would have construction systems that would enable them to predict accurately the events in their environments. They would not necessarily have to be great scientists, nor would their construction systems necessarily be particularly complex. Of greater importance would be their ability to predict well within their own worlds. This implies that primitive or relatively uneducated people who could make effective predictions within the framework of their own environments and cultures would be optimally functioning people, like anyone else with an effective construction system.

It can also be inferred that optimally functioning people would rarely experience anxiety or threat because they would seldom come across anything that fell outside the range of their construction systems. They would rarely need to make radical changes to their systems, which would already be flexible and functioning in an effective way. They would probably experience few feelings of guilt because their behaviour would rarely be at variance with their core role constructs. If they were to become aware that their construction systems were not capable of properly accommodating events in their environments, they would find aggressive, adventurous ways of expanding and thereby improving their construction systems. Because their systems would be flexible and comprehensive, they would seldom show signs of hostility.

13.8 Views on psychopathology

Kelly defines *psychological disturbances* as any form of behaviour whereby individuals go on using constructs in spite of their being repeatedly and consistently invalidated (that is, although they are shown to be ineffective), as when someone persists in classifying people as hostile even though they actually want to help them (Kelly, 1955b:831). What this means in everyday language is that there is inadequate contact with reality: people do not accept that their constructs do not provide them with sound predictions. A general characteristic of disturbed people is that they believe their problems are caused by the actual circumstances of their lives, whereas in reality their problems arise from their interpretation of those circumstances and people need never be victims of their own biographies.

Just as the behaviour of healthy individuals is part of their construction systems, so the symptoms of mentally disturbed people are part of their construction systems: their symptoms should be regarded as behaviour directed towards anticipating events or asking questions. Consequently, the presenting problems (that is, problems of which clients complain) can give therapists an idea of the misinterpretations or ‘faulty’ constructs that are causing problems.

Kelly is opposed to diagnosis in the traditional sense, believing that it is rarely of value simply to classify clients into various categories of illness. For him, a diagnosis automatically implies planning the therapy because the therapist must be intent upon improving his or her clients’ problematic construction systems.

As a result, Kelly draws a broad distinction between neuroses (which he says are characterised by anxiety and an ongoing search for new constructs whose suitability must be tested, accompanied by feelings of insecurity) and psychoses (typically, the patient has discovered a solution, but a faulty one, and lives by it in spite of repeated evidence that the solution is invalid). He explains finer distinctions in the behaviour of different patients in terms of types of faulty construing methods, such as the use of extremely impermeable or rigid constructs, too many non-verbal constructs, or constructs that are too loose.

Self-evaluation question

- How can an individual’s construction system be improved, either through the person’s own efforts or with the aid of someone else, such as a psychotherapist?

13.9 Implications and applications

What are the implications of Kelly’s construct theory for everyday contexts?

The broad implication of Kelly’s thinking for all aspects of individual and social functioning is clear: *humans determine their own fate by the way they construe their world, and so the potential for improvement and progress is virtually unlimited.* This broad statement will be substantiated by a few comments on one or two specific applications of the theory of personal constructs.

13.9.1 Research and measurement

Since personality, according to this theory, consists of constructs, it is obvious that *measurement must consist of establishing what constructs individuals use and how they use them.* Kelly developed an interesting technique for this purpose, known as the ‘Role Construct Repertory Test’ (abbreviated to REP Test) or the ‘Repertory Grid’ or the ‘grid method’ (Bannister & Fransella, 1980; Bannister & Mair, 1968; Burger, 2010; Schultz & Schultz, 2012).

This method gives subjects the opportunity of revealing the constructs that they use in certain interpersonal situations by construing relevant events. In Figure 13.4 the constructs that scholars use at school are examined by asking them to compare

all the teachers, grouped in threes, with one another using a pre-prepared grid or roster. For each comparison (indicated by circles on the grid) they have to decide which two teachers are alike and which one is different, and then indicate what construct this distinction is based on. In this way, scholars reveal both poles of each of the constructs they use in this situation. The two poles are referred to as the *construct* (or emergent) pole and the *contrast* (or implicit) pole. So a scholar might say that Mr Khumalo and Mrs Buti are similar because they are both 'fair', while Mr Mosamelo is different because he is 'unfair'. 'Fair' therefore represents the 'construct pole' (indicated with two X's on the grid), whereas 'unfair' is the contrast pole of the fair–unfair construct. The examiner could then ask the scholar to check the other teachers who are construed as similar to those in the construct pole. In the example, Ms Segalo and Mr Govender were construed as also being 'fair'.

Sort	Self	Mr Khumalo	Mrs Buti	Mr Adam	Mr Mosamelo	Mrs Baker	Ms Segalo	Mr Govender	Mrs Smith	Mr Radebe	Construct pole	Contrast pole
1		X	X			✓	✓				Fair	Unfair
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												
10												

Example of a grid form in the REP test

The scholars proceed in this manner until they have compared every teacher with every other teacher. Instead of the names of teachers, the grid could also include a list of role titles such as mother, father, brother, successful person, threatening person. 'Self' could also be included in such a grid and, in this way, information could be gained on how the person sees him- or herself in relation to others. The grid gives the psychologist an insight into what constructs the subjects are using and how they use them (for example, what variety of constructs they employ and whether they use them in a rigid or flexible way).

The following wikipedia website provides Repertory Grid software links:
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repertory_grid

The grid method is not only extremely interesting; it is also highly useful because it is flexible and can be used in almost any situation or context, for example, in business and consumer contexts (Lemke, Clark & Wilson, 2010), in collaborative group decision making (Castellani, 2011), in career guidance (Jankowicz & Cooper, 1982), in psychotherapy (Neimeyer, 1984, 1985, 2009), in education (Kreber *et al.*, 2003) and in entrepreneurial research and teaching in cross-cultural contexts (Klapper, 2011). However, the usefulness of the instrument seems to depend very much on the skill and experience of the examiner (Feist, Feist and Roberts, 2013).

Enrichment

Examples linked to the South African context

1. In a chapter on *Intercultural space in Higher Education Curricula*, Nonnie Botha (2011) refers to Kelly's Repertory Grid as a useful methodology in intercultural studies, especially to identify determinants for culturally sensitive curricula in the South African context.
2. In a paper presented at the South African Information Security Multi-Conference (SAISMC) held in Port Elizabeth from 17–18 May 2010, Robert Pattinson and Cate Jerram from the Business School of the University of Adelaide in South Australia, refer to the Repertory Grid Technique of Kelly as a suitable tool to investigate the risk perceptions of computer end-users and the situational factors that influence these perceptions.

Activity

Replace the names of teachers provided in the example of the grid form with names of people you know, compare them and see which constructs you tend to use.

13.9.2 Therapy

In terms of Kelly's theory, a psychologist, particularly a psychotherapist, is someone who specialises in understanding other people's construction systems, especially their core role constructs. It is therefore of utmost importance that the psychologist's own construction system be pliable and broad enough to incorporate the construction systems of others so that he or she can understand how they construe.

Kelly developed a novel form of psychotherapy as a direct application of his personality theory. This therapeutic method (known as *fixed role therapy*) works as follows: after systematic study of the client's construction system, the therapist consults with the client, and perhaps also with other therapists, and together they create an imaginary person who has a 'more acceptable' construction system. The therapist then persuades the client to play the role of this new 'person'. The immediate goal is to make the client realise that he or she can change and improve his or her constructs to become more effective. The first step is quite simply to persuade the client to experiment with constructs, and the ultimate goal is to bring about a reconstruction of the client's construction system.

Self-evaluation questions

- Briefly explain the Role Construct Repertory Test.
- Briefly explain the process of planned role therapy.

13.9.3 The interpretation and handling of aggression

As shown in 13.5.6, Kelly uses the word *aggression* to refer to the individual's spontaneous attempts to improve his construction system – in other words, to refer to something completely positive. If we want to know how Kelly interprets what we would normally call aggression, we should look instead at what he has to say about *hostility*. He defines hostility as the attempt to prove, 'by hook or by crook', that ineffective constructs are in fact correct. Violence (or aggression, in the usual sense of the word) is just one of the methods that can be used to enforce the validity of constructs.

It is relatively easy to show that Kelly's definition of hostility is applicable in cases where there are certain expectations at issue, for example, in the case of Mr Soni in 13.5.6. If his prediction that his wife will be unswervingly obedient to him proves faulty, this may make him feel anxious and threatened because he realises (half unconsciously) that he has no suitable constructs for this situation, and that he is faced with extensive changes to his construction system. He may therefore choose to force his wife – by violence, if necessary – to behave the way his existing constructs have predicted she will behave.

It is, however, less easy to show how aggressive behaviour such as robbery, revenge or premeditated murder as a means of getting rid of someone, or going to war for the sake of imperialist, expansionist goals, fits in with Kelly's definition.

Self-evaluation question

- Do you think Kelly's theory has any contribution to make in curbing aggression in the South African context? Would it help to try to change the way people think about each other and various other issues?

13.10 Evaluation of the theory

What contribution does Kelly's theory make to the better understanding of human functioning?

Kelly died at a fairly young age. As a result, he published relatively little work and his theory is incomplete in a number of respects, although it has been expanded by some of his students, particularly Bannister and Fransella (1980) and Sechrest (1963; 1983).

Several comments, both positive and negative, can be made about Kelly's theory. On the positive side, it should be emphasised that Kelly was largely responsible for the fact that *constructivism* (that is, the view that humans create their own worlds through their interpretations) has taken root in psychology and now has a wide following. In this regard he was in advance of his time. Many of these ideas are captured in the

ecosystemic approach which is discussed in the latter part of this book and recent research (Efran, McNamee, Warren & Raskin, 2014) testifies to the clear links.

His theory is an original and interesting new contribution to the field of personology, furnishing a refreshing new model of human functioning. The theory creates numerous new possibilities for research: it is the only personality theory that bases the explanation of all human behaviour on the model of a scientist who tries to predict events. It is probably as a result of its fresh point of departure that Kelly's theory is well known and influential all over the world, especially in Britain (Jankowicz, 1987). Over and above the new avenues for research and the reinterpretation of previous research results and theories which the theory has opened up (Aiken, 1993:193), it also offers a form of psychotherapy that differs in important respects from traditional psychotherapeutic techniques. One of Kelly's most fruitful contributions was, however, the development of a highly interesting and useful measuring instrument, namely the Role Construct Repertory Test. This so-called 'grid method' of personality measurement is without doubt one of the most flexible research instruments at the disposal of personology today and the fact that it is still generating research in various fields of study, is proof of its lasting impact.

On the other hand, the theory has a number of shortcomings. Although the theory clarifies many of the details of the process of construing in general, it leaves many questions unanswered, such as:

- What is the precise relationship between constructs and behaviour – in other words, how does the construction system influence behaviour?
- How can the theory help us in understanding individual differences between people (Maddi, 1989:354)?
- How does the individual decide, in a given situation, which part of his or her construction system to use?
- How does the individual decide which specific construct(s) to apply? On what basis does the individual decide which alternative of a construct to select?
- Are subordinate constructs always deduced from superordinate constructs, or is the reverse also possible? (For example, can one proceed from the subordinate construct pole 'alcoholic' to the superordinate construct 'sick–healthy' and from this point make further deductions leading to other subordinate constructs?)
- Is behaviour directed at validating a single construct, or can it test the validity of different constructs simultaneously?
- Although we know that the individual tries to improve his or her construction system, we do not know on what basis he or she decides to do this by means of expansion or definition.
- Is the theory able to offer any explanation for the emotional aspects of human functioning, such as intense happiness, love for someone one has known for a long time, or sexual pleasure?

Finally, it must be stressed that Kelly's theory should be seen as his construction of personality, and that Kelly himself did not necessarily intend it as a realistic representation of the actual state of things. He saw it, rather, as an interpretation that should be evaluated purely in terms of its utility for the case in hand. If the interpretation does not work in any given situation, it can be changed and improved at any stage, just as any person's construction system can be changed and improved. Kelly (1963:155) points out that he has tried to use the constructs of his theory in a propositional manner – which is a more scientific and healthy manner of construing, and Aiken (1993:193) believes that Kelly would undoubtedly have changed his theory had he lived longer.

Self-evaluation question

- What contribution does George Kelly's construct theory make to a better understanding of human functioning and what are the shortcomings in his theory?

13.11 Suggested reading

Caputi, P, Bell, RC, Hennessey, D (2011). Analyzing grids: New and traditional approaches. In Caputi, P, Viney, LL, Walker B *et al.* *Personal Construct Methodology*. Malden MA: John Wiley & Sons. (doi:10.1002/9781119953616.ch8.)

Fransella, F, Bell, R and Bannister, D (2004). *A Manual for Repertory Grid Technique* (2nd ed.). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Fransella, F (2005). *The Essential Practitioners' Handbook of Personal Construct Psychology*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Kelly, GA (1955a). *The psychology of personal constructs: A theory of personality*. (1). New York: Norton.

Kelly, GA (1955b). *The psychology of personal constructs: Clinical diagnosis and psychotherapy*. (2). New York: Norton.

Kelly, GA (1963). *A theory of personality: The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: Norton.

Maher, B (ed.). (1969). *Clinical psychology and personality: The selected papers of George Kelly*. New York: Wiley.

A website which provides Repertory-Grid software links:

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repertory_grid



Chapter 14

The existential theory of Viktor Frankl (1905–1997)

Teria Shantall

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14.1 Outcomes

- Identify in which ways Frankl's theory is unique in relation to other personality theories.
- Experience the value and validity of Frankl's concepts of the freedom of will, will to meaning and meaning in life.
- Understand how a lack of meaning and purpose in life can thwart personal growth and optimal well-being and lead to mental ill health or a fruitless focus on pleasure and power.
- Grasp how a morally responsible and value-directed lifestyle with a focus on what is truly meaningful in life can lead to optimal human functioning.

14.2 Background

How did Frankl come to develop his theory?



Viktor E Frankl
Source: Getty Images
Gallo Images

Viktor E Frankl (1905–1997) is regarded as one of the foremost representatives of existential psychology. Frankl's ideas grew in the rich intellectual soil of Vienna (the city where Sigmund Freud and other famous psychologists such as Alfred Adler established their careers). It is in this city that Frankl worked as professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at the medical school of the University of Vienna and as director of the Vienna Neurological Polyclinic for many years. Frankl visited South Africa several times, and in 1984 the University of South Africa awarded him an Honorary Doctorate in Education. This is one of many honorary doctorates bestowed on him by universities all over the world. He is the author of over 30 books that have already been translated into at least 32 languages. He published over 700 articles and taught in more than 40 countries on all continents. His concentration camp experiences were recorded in his most famous book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Over 80 editions of this book have been published and, at present, there are 12 million copies in print across the world.

Frankl's ideas became highly popular in America. The first logotherapy training centre outside Vienna was opened in America in 1970 at the International University of the United States of America in San Diego, where the author was privileged to be taught by Frankl. Since then various logotherapy institutes and training centres have been established worldwide. In South Africa, the Viktor Frankl Foundation was founded in 1968, followed by the Viktor Frankl Institute of South Africa in 2014, an organisation that, in collaboration with the Centre for Applied Psychology of the University of South Africa, offers training courses in logotherapy.

Frankl's approach sounded a note that was quite new, particularly in American psychology where, at the time, psychoanalytic and behaviourist thinking held sway. At university, Frankl was a student of Sigmund Freud. At Freud's invitation, an assignment of Frankl's was published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*

KEY TERM

will to meaning: the desire to find meaning and purpose in life

in 1924. Later Frankl was also a student of Alfred Adler. However, he became disillusioned with the teachings of these great masters. He felt that Freud placed undue emphasis on the *will to pleasure* (need-satisfaction) as the driving force of human behaviour. Adler over-accentuated the *will to power* (self-esteem needs) as the major motive for human behaviour. To Frankl's mind, Freud and Adler portrayed human nature one-sidedly. The human person seeks more in life than mere pleasure and power. Frankl came to believe that, as *human beings*, we are *primarily motivated by a will to meaning*.

Frankl's whole life was earmarked by a deep contemplation of the meaning and purpose of human existence. As a 13-year-old boy, he strongly opposed the views of his science teacher who contended that human life is ultimately no more than a process of combustion. Young Frankl sprang to his feet and said: 'If this is the case, what meaning then does life have?' (Frankl, 2014:63). Efforts to reduce human functioning to sub-human levels, and to portray people as mere mechanisms or animals, were opposed by Frankl all his life.

Frankl started developing his own school of thought, called logotherapy. Logotherapy moved beyond what Frankl perceived as the narrow confines of the Freudian and Adlerian schools of thought. His brand of psychotherapy became known as the 'Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy', the first two schools being represented by Freud and Adler.

Frankl did not work out his ideas in the comfort and ease of his study. From 1942 to 1945, Frankl – already a well-known psychiatrist and neurologist – was interned in several Nazi concentration camps. The worst was the death camp, Auschwitz, where he was Jewish prisoner number 199104. In these camps, prisoners were deprived of everything which, in normal circumstances, contributes to a sense of psychological well-being and feelings of dignity and worth. Yet it was in precisely these most adverse conditions that he became convinced of the significant role of values in people's lives. Frankl observed that the phenomenon of having something to live for and live by was what enabled prisoners to hold on to the will to live in conditions that otherwise made death seem like a solution.

Frankl is an existentialist psychologist with an unusually positive perspective. For an existentialist such as Jean-Paul Sartre, human beings are victims of their freedom – they are doomed to choice. Their freedom to choose is an absurd freedom because they must inevitably confront tragedy and death. Frankl's belief in the indestructible significance and unconditional meaningfulness of life despite what he called *the tragic triad of pain, guilt and death*, makes his position a far more positive one. Frankl spoke about *tragic optimism*. By that he means that we can find meaning even in suffering (our vulnerability), guilt (our fallibility) and death (our mortality). In fact, take these tragic aspects out of life and you destroy its meaning! Why? Frankl offers the following reasons: Only in the face of *suffering* are we confronted with what *ought not to be*. This provokes our decision

The website below provides a link to a video in which Viktor Frankl talks about his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, uploaded by Lifespan Learning Institute.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_Cey-UZX-E

to strive for and enact what *ought to be*. With this kind of attitude, we can exercise human greatness in the exemplary way we decide to deal with a very painful and distressing situation. Through our fallibility, we exercise our ability to learn from our mistakes and to right our wrongs. Only in the face of *guilt* does it make sense to improve. *Death*, the reality of it, makes us aware of our lives as a once-given and unique opportunity to live life as it is meant to be lived, each in our own particular situation or place in this world.

14.3 The view of the person underlying the theory

Which basic assumptions about human beings and their functioning underlie Frankl's theory?

Frankl's view of the person highlights the fact that, as humans, we have been given freedom to be able to exercise responsibility, that is, to live a life beyond brute existence; to live on a dimension of meaning in realising timeless values as these emanate from a divine or transhuman dimension; to live highly personalised lives as we, each in our own unique way, embrace the opportunities and fulfil the tasks that life presents to each one of us.

14.3.1 The freedom to be responsible

According to existentialist philosophers and psychologists, the *human person* is primarily a spiritual being – a being that has freedom and responsibility. It is this existential view of the person that forms the basis of Frankl's view and his description of personality. As Frankl sees it, the person is not merely a highly developed animal shaped by the forces of heredity and environment. The human person has been given the freedom to be responsible – a quality unique to humankind. The freedom to be responsible means that as human beings we constantly face choices, and that we have the freedom to choose. Consequently, we are not compelled to behave in any particular way. We can say 'yes' as readily as we can say 'no'. Because of our free will, we can be held responsible for our choices. We cannot, for example, ascribe our actions to conditioning (the influences of the environment) or to a drive. At the most, we may say that we have decided to give in to our drives. And since we are responsible, we have to bear the consequences of our choices. This freedom to choose, therefore, is what represents the spiritual, or as Frankl calls it, the **noögenic dimension**. It is this dimension which, in Frankl's view, actually identifies us as human beings.

KEY TERMS

noögenic dimension: the third or spiritual level of existence which is unique to human beings

meaning: the one right thing to do in a particular situation or moment of life in terms of what that situation requires (means)

14.3.2 A level of being beyond brute existence

Frankl believes that the human person needs to find a reason (purpose) to live; that *true fulfilment is hardly possible without a sense of purpose (spiritual direction) in life*. Frankl feels that the central issue for the human person is not the struggle to survive, characteristic of animal existence, but the struggle to find and experience **meaning** in life.

By ‘meaning’ Frankl means the opportunity, task or duty presented to and discerned by us through our conscience as something we are to embrace, realise and act upon in each and every unique situation of our own personal lives. *Every situation of life contains a unique challenge to live our lives purposefully, with meaning.* We are meant to live lives that transcend a mindless kind of existence in the futile pursuit of only pleasure and power.

KEY TERMS

subhuman levels of being: ways of functioning that human beings share in common with animals

self-transcendence: the ability human beings have to think about themselves, to evaluate and judge themselves, and to *change* themselves

Frankl takes a strong stand against the reductionism of psychoanalysts and learning theorists, who explain all human behaviour on the basis of phenomena that belong to the **subhuman levels of being**, in effect denying that there are any intrinsic differences between human and animal behaviour. Frankl does not, however, totally reject the views of psychoanalysts and learning theorists. It is true that on a physical and crude psychosocial level we have much in common with the animal. However, by contending that the human being is nothing but an animal, psychoanalysts and learning theorists present an incomplete portrayal of the human person. As human beings, we have properties *not* shared with the animal kingdom. **Self-transcendence** is a uniquely human capacity. Unlike the animal, *we have the freedom to rise above conditions in being able to think and also do something about them!* We can make changes in our world. We can also change ourselves, become better human beings.

The experience of a will to meaning is a reality that cannot be regarded simply as a rationalisation of hidden drives or suppressed instincts. Frankl (2008:105) says of this:

There are some authors who contend that meanings and values are ‘nothing but defence mechanisms, reaction formations and sublimations’. But as for myself, I would not be willing to live merely for the sake of my ‘defence mechanisms’, nor would I be ready to die merely for the sake of my ‘reaction formations’. Man, however, is able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values.

Although Frankl’s views have much in common with humanists such as Abraham Maslow, he should not be classified as a straightforward humanist. His transcendental vision of being encompasses a great deal more than Maslow’s theory of self-actualisation. Frankl maintains that *self-actualisation* is not man’s ultimate goal nor even his primary intention. Self-actualisation, if made an end in itself, contradicts the self-transcendent quality of human existence. ‘Only to the extent to which man fulfils a meaning out there in the world, does he fulfil himself. If he sets out to actualize himself rather than fulfil a meaning, self-actualization immediately loses its justification.’ (Frankl, 2014:38)

Frankl does not see us as striving merely to maintain a state of homeostasis or need-satisfaction. Nor are we primarily intent on self-actualisation. We want to be involved in something outside our own skins. We want to know about our humanity; we want to know why, for what reason, we have been created. What is it that we as human beings are meant to be? *We want to live our lives purposefully – for a good cause, for some sensible reason.* We will make great sacrifices for the sake of a cause to which we have devoted ourselves, or on behalf of the people we love and to whom we have dedicated our lives, and in wanting to live a life in line with our conscience, that is, before something or Someone greater than ourselves.

Self-evaluation question

- Consider those aspects in the theories of the behaviouristic, psychoanalytic and humanistic schools of thought that Frankl opposes in his own existential view of the human person.
- Which features of the human personality have not received due recognition by these theorists, according to Frankl?

14.3.3 The transhuman dimension

Frankl's view of the person (that the human being has free will and this will is a will to meaning), is embedded in a particular worldview and philosophy of life, namely, that life has meaning. Freedom without responsibility is senseless. It leads only to arbitrariness, lawlessness and chaos. It follows, however, that the freedom to be able to question life as to its meaning would be equally senseless if such meaning does not exist. Frankl contends that *meaning is not something we create or invent. Meaning is found.* This means that meaning (or that which gives us a sense of meaning) is something that exists in an objective sense. The objective existence of the meaning of life is phenomenologically proved by the fact that in the manifold situations of life, we feel *addressed* by our conscience; *called* upon to act responsibly. According to Frankl, *conscience is the vehicle through which we detect meaning: the one right thing to do in any particular situation or moment in life.*

KEY TERM

Transhuman dimension:

timeless and universal values and meanings that address the human conscience in unique ways and that can be discovered (grasped) and experienced by anyone, at any time, under all circumstances

Conscience, unlike the superego, has *transcendent* qualities. To have a conscience means that we are able to discern higher values and meanings, grasp their significance and freely embrace them. This means that we are not merely subjected to social restrictions internalised by a punitive superego that we succumb to out of fear of what will happen to us if we don't. Conscience functions on a higher level. It is our link to the **transhuman dimension**, our ability to *hear* the voice of the transcendent. 'Through the conscience of the human person, a transhuman agent *personat* – which literally means, "is sounding through"' (Frankl, 2014:52).

Outside and beyond our ability to manipulate and destroy them, life's meanings and values, emanating from a Transhuman dimension, have universal and timeless significance. Life's meanings can be discovered and experienced by anyone, at any time, under all circumstances. This is what Frankl means when he says that life is unconditionally meaningful.

The experience of the unconditional meaningfulness of life is illustrated by the phenomenon of *faith*: the unshakeable belief that life has *ultimate meaning*. The subjective experience of the objective existence of a Transhuman dimension is graphically contained in the Scriptural description of faith, which is defined as 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' (Hebrews 11:1). Frankl maintains *that it is the man or woman of faith that can in spite of all say 'yes' to the meaning of life under all conditions and circumstances.*

Example

A riveting demonstration of living by the dictates of conscience is provided by the following true story:

Leah was appointed a cleaning lady in one of the barracks of the concentration camp. Here she witnessed how every morning, when the women were to be selected for work (chopping trees in the freezing cold with no clothing except a thin rag), there was great anxiety, disorder and brutality. Women were dragged out by force to go to work. She set herself the task of organising these women, letting the younger and stronger ones go out to work and letting the others work in and around the barracks. She worked out a rotation scheme so that every woman had rest in between two days of work. 'So I had the names of the women who would be going to work, and every morning at 7 o'clock, my group was outside without any screams and without any cries and without any damage done to people.' So impressed was the camp commander with the order she created that Leah was put in charge of three barracks. About 300 women prisoners came under her control. Leah took these women under her wing throughout the years of terrible suffering that followed. The sweet triumph of Leah's liberation was that she was able to collect together the women who had been entrusted to her charge. 'All that I remember is going to the barracks and getting my girls, all of them.' Looking back on her experiences, she could remark: 'I have a very clear conscience. I like myself. I have not failed myself. I can live with my own conscience. If I could do something, I did. I put myself out to help others. I saved my girls. Being in the position I was in the camp had its own temptations and choices, but I did what was the right thing to do.' (Shantall, 2002:190–192)

Activity

Consider Frankl's view of conscience as the vehicle through which we detect life's meanings (challenges, responsibilities, tasks and calls) and Freud's concept of the superego. How will you answer the first question and how will you illustrate it in an answer to the second question if you are to discuss these questions in a class of psychology students?

- What are the differences between conscience and the superego?
- How do we experience our own conscience? How, by contrast, do we experience a super-ego type of guilt? How can we know the difference?

Self-evaluation question

- Frankl (1968:17) maintains that every situation contains a question requiring an answer from us and that 'each question has only one answer – the right one!' Do you feel confronted with choice? Do you sometimes find it hard to make the right choice? Consider this riveting episode out of Frankl's own life:

Frankl (1997) uses his experience of pre-World War II in Germany as an example of the transhuman dimension. In the years leading up to the outbreak of World War II, many restrictions against Jews were in force in Austria and Germany and Jews were already being rounded up and transported to Nazi concentration camps that had sprung up all over occupied Europe. Frankl had waited for years until his quota number came up by which he would be permitted to go to the United States. At last he was asked to come to the American Consulate to pick up his visa. Instead of rushing to pick up his visa, he stood back for a moment to think of the consequences of the decision he was going to make. His parents would

most probably be shipped off to a concentration camp at some stage, so if he decided to go to the United States, chances were slim that he would ever see them again. This was such a major decision that he felt that he needed a sign from Above to aid him. When he returned home, he noticed a piece of marble on a table and asked his father what it was. His father told him that it was part of the Ten Commandments that he had picked up from the rubble of a synagogue that had been burnt down by the Nazis. The letter on the piece of marble referred to a specific commandment, namely ‘Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee’. Frankl decided to stay in Germany with his parents.

It was very costly, but in the end the right choice. Frankl was rounded up along with his newly-wedded wife, his parents and brother. The fact that he survived while these loved ones of his all perished, convinced him that he had a very special task in life to fulfil. The promise of the commandment to honour his parents, to regard their safety and well-being as more important than his own, was fulfilled. Frankl lived until the ripe old age of ninety-two. He travelled the world up to his 90th birthday, lecturing to audiences worldwide on what he called *the defiant power of the human spirit*. His experiences in the camps convinced him that we can retain our human decency and dignity, act honourably and in an exemplary way, despite the very worst of circumstances. In overcoming difficult and painful situations in this way, we turn adversity into a spiritual triumph!

14.3.4 A highly personalised (personally accountable) way of being

Frankl contends that we cannot explain a higher dimension from a lower dimension of being. To do so, is reductionism. What Frankl calls the *supra-* or *transcendent* dimension of being evades full human grasp. We can only become ever more open and receptive to the dimension of timeless values that each one of us experience in personal and unique ways. That is why no-one, or any one particular belief system or religion, can claim to have the sole right to the whole truth about everything. We cannot be dogmatic about what we believe. Every one of us has the inalienable right and freedom to decide before what or whom we feel accountable: whether before society, humanity, our own conscience, or before God. We also perceive a truth from various and unique perspectives. We also grow in wisdom and understanding. We are constantly in a state of *becoming* what we are meant to be: ‘Man transcends his being toward an *ought*’ (Frankl 1968:136). The tension between what is and what *ought to be* operates through our conscience until the very last day of our lives.

The point Frankl seeks to make is that something can only be meaningful to the person if it is personally experienced as such. That is why Frankl (2000:77, 78) contends that if religion is to survive, it will have to be profoundly personalised:

Religion is genuine only where it is existential, where we are not somehow driven to it, but commit ourselves to it by freely choosing to be religious. The existentiality of religiousness has to be matched by its spontaneity. Genuine religiousness must unfold in its own time. Never can anyone be forced to it.

Frankl's philosophy of life, namely, *that life holds meaning (is and remains meaningful) under all circumstances and that meaning can be experienced by anyone at any time and anywhere*, is therefore fundamental to Frankl's view of man. The human person is a being who can question the meaning of life, search for meaning and, in finding it, realise it in his or her own life. 'Man's heart is restless unless he has found, and fulfilled, meaning and purpose in life.' (Frankl, 2014:31) Without a sense of meaning, even ultimate meaning, a person feels unfulfilled as a human being. Frankl contends that we are only fully what we have been created to be when we 'live and move and have our being' on the dimension of meaning.

Self-evaluation questions

The unconscious God

Consider the following statement of Frankl: 'There is a religious sense deeply rooted in each and every man's unconscious depths' (2000:14). As an illustration that this sense may break through unexpectedly, he quotes the following experience of a student who suffered a severe mental illness:

In the mental hospital, I was locked like an animal in a cage. I was given daily shock treatment, insulin shock, and sufficient drugs so that I lost most of the next several weeks. But in the darkness I had acquired a sense of my own unique mission in the world. I knew then, as I know now, that I must have been preserved for some reason – however small, it is something that only I can do, and it is vitally important that I do it. And because in the darkest moment of my life, when I lay abandoned as an animal in a cage, when because of the forgetfulness induced by ECT I could not call out to Him, He was there. In the solitary darkness of the 'pit' where men had abandoned me, *He was there*. When I did not know His Name, He was there; God was there.

- What do you believe? Do you regard yourself as religious or not? Why? Can religion in the wider sense, that is, in the way Frankl defined it, not also mean faith, or a conviction, a belief in what, for you, makes meaningful sense?

Activity

Is there anything about Frankl's theory that appeals to you? Why?

Explain to another person what struck you about Frankl's theory in a way that will evoke this person's interest. Discuss with the person why the theory is thought-provoking, inspiring and challenging. Also raise questions about Frankl's beliefs and discuss these openly and sincerely.

14.4 The structure of the personality

How does Frankl view the structure of the human personality?

14.4.1 The three dimensions of the personality

Frankl maintains that there are three levels or dimensions of existence: the *physical*, the *psychological* and the *spiritual*. This idea is expounded in Frankl's *dimensional ontology*.

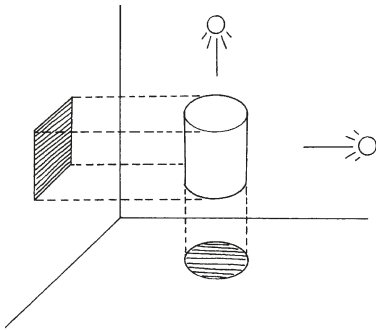


Figure 14.1 A glass with two projections
Source: Estate of Viktor Frankl

On the physical level the human person could be described as ‘nothing but a complex biochemical mechanism powered by a combustion system that energises computers with prodigious storage facilities for retaining encoded information’ (cited in Frankl, 2014:63). On the psychological level the person has needs and drives, in many ways similar to those of animals. However, it is the spiritual or noölogical dimension, the third level of existence, which is unique to us as human beings.

If human behaviour is viewed from a sub-human (non-spiritual) level of being, the uniquely human or spiritual aspects of human existence will either be missed or seen in distortion. Frankl explains this thought by way of the following analogy (see Figure 14.1).

Example

Imagine that the person is like a three-dimensional glass that is open on top. When this glass is projected out of its three-dimensional space onto a horizontal and vertical two-dimensional plane, the three-dimensional character of the glass is lost. When the three-dimensional glass is projected onto a flat background by means of a light shining from one side, the glass, by way of its shadow, will appear to be square (a two-dimensional or closed system). When the light shines from another angle, the glass, by way of its shadow, will appear to be circular (another two-dimensional or closed system). The glass has square and circular properties; it contains or includes both elements. However, it only appears as a glass when it is seen in its three-dimensional *wholeness*.

As in the example above, the human being resembles a machine on the physical level and an animal on the psychological level. Both are closed systems, since in the case of both there is no indication whatsoever of a freedom of will. Such images of the human being not only contradict each other, but they also represent incomplete and therefore distorted images of the human person as a whole. If we, however, maintain that as human beings we do have a body and a psyche, yes, but that we are neither just the one nor the other nor even a combination of both, but essentially something *more* than only body and psyche, we move closer to the truth.

Due to our spiritual capacities we, as human beings, are free – *we are open systems, that is, open towards ourselves (we can think about and change ourselves) and towards the world (we can be addressed, called to responsibility and respond appropriately).*

KEY TERM

dimensional ontology: a three-dimensional view of human functioning on a physical, psychological and also a spiritual level of being

Frankl’s **dimensional ontology** can perhaps be better understood if we compare Frankl’s view of humankind with the behaviouristic and psychoanalytic views of humankind. In behaviouristic or learning theory, the human being is seen primarily as a mechanism. Human behaviour is seen as shaped by the influences of the environment (a stimulus/response model of being). In psychoanalytic theory, the human being is seen analogous to the animal. The human being’s behaviour is determined by drives, needs and instincts. Not only do these two theories contradict one another, but in the case of both, our very essence as human beings,

namely, our freedom of will, is left out of the picture. *We have a body and a psyche, but as essentially spiritual beings, we are free to direct our behaviour: we can use body and soul (psyche) to achieve ends that we ourselves have determined as important and meaningful to us.* We can, therefore, exercise mastery and control over our instincts, needs and emotions.

The holistic nature of human functioning is explained by Frankl as being due to the fact of our *self-awareness*. Unlike the animal, we as human beings intelligently experience our physical drives and emotional needs. What are we to do about them; how are we to direct them; how are we to use them intelligently and responsibly and within which moral boundaries? Put in another way, *we are present in everything that we experience*. Human behaviour can, therefore, never be understood without us, that is, outside the framework of the experiencing and evaluating person; the person who decides to act in one way or another. According to Frankl, therefore, a full comprehension of human nature and behaviour is hardly possible if sight is lost of the spiritual or uniquely human dimension of being.

14.4.2 The spiritual core of the personality

Frankl describes the spiritual dimension as the personal ground of being. *The human personality has a spiritual core.* We are, in fact, our higher form of awareness (consciousness as conscience). ‘Man is spirit. By the very act of his own self-transcendence he leaves the plane of the merely biopsychological and enters the sphere of the specifically human. In actuality, man is free and responsible.’ (Frankl 1968:63) From the basis of this evaluating and self-determining ground of being, the personality of a person is formed. According to Frankl, therefore, it is neither primarily our genetic make-up, nor our environments that shape our personalities. It is what we do with what we have been given in terms of genetic make-up; how we respond to the influences of the social environments in which we have been and are placed; and how we act in the situations in which we find ourselves every day. We develop our personalities; determine the kind of characteristics we come to be known by.

Self-evaluation questions

- Explain Frankl’s view of the human personality as a whole, that is, as more than the sum total of its parts.
- What does Frankl mean when he speaks about the *subhuman dimensions of being*?

14.5 The dynamics of the personality

How does Frankl perceive the dynamics of the personality?

Frankl speaks about *noödynamics* or the spiritual dynamics of being human, rather than psychodynamics. As spiritual beings we are differentiated from animals in that our will is free. Our wills are not simply instrumental in satisfying

instincts (pleasure) or ensuring self-preservation (power) in an adaptive play with the prohibitions placed upon us by our social environments. Human beings are orientated towards meaning. Also in contrast to animals, humans can transcend themselves and their circumstances. They can seek and find meaning in life, and dedicate themselves to this meaning. The dynamics of the personality are therefore based on the following:

- the freedom of the will
- the will to meaning
- the meaning of life.

14.5.1 The freedom of the will

KEY TERM

freedom of the will:
the capacity of self-determination through the exercise of choice

Man's **freedom of will** belongs to the immediate data of his experience, Frankl points out. A phenomenological investigation (a precise, unprejudiced analysis of a human being's world of experience), highlights the fact that *each of us experiences our will as free*. Every one of us will admit that we continually face choices and that we make decisions that determine the future course of events. Even a decision to do nothing, to let circumstances take their course, or not to make anything special of ourselves and our talents but to simply allow events to shape our lives, is a decision that represents a specific approach to life. We cannot pretend that we are forced or driven to something, nor that we are conditioned or programmed to do anything. With tongue in cheek, Frankl (1968:3) maintains that 'actually only two classes of people maintain that their will is not free: schizophrenic patients suffering from the delusion that their will is manipulated and their thoughts controlled by others, and alongside them, deterministic philosophers'!

We are, however, not absolutely free. We must contend with our own limitations and the constraints placed upon us by our particular environments. Our freedom is made evident by what we will achieve, despite our limitations; how we will deal with and transcend the constraints imposed upon us by our environments.

Example

Do we have the power to change our circumstances or are we the victims of fate? This question is answered in a most compelling way by the story of one of our Unisa students: Our student, along with his two brothers, grew up on the streets. They never knew who their father was and had some idea that their mother, out of poverty, had been forced to abandon them. After joining a violent youth gang as youngsters, the youngest brother was killed in street fighting. The two older brothers were shocked by the death of their youngest brother into a realisation that they might be heading the same senseless way.

The elder brother found himself a job and paid for the schooling of our student, who, out of love for his elder brother, worked hard and not only matriculated but also got a bursary to continue his studies through Unisa. He worked during the day and studied at night, and it was a great day for both brothers when he graduated. What is he doing now? Once a street child and a violent youngster, he is now a social worker working with street children in impoverished neighbourhoods!

Enrichment

Do you experience your own will as free? Have you made difficult and costly choices in your own life? Do you also have a story to tell?

14.5.2 The will to meaning

Enrichment

Thinking about your life, how do you feel about it? Are you satisfied with it? Is it going somewhere? What do you want to do with your life or see accomplished in it? Why?

Your own thoughts on the above questions may have made you aware that you want to experience your life as something *meaningful* and *worthwhile*; that you have a desire to make your life something *special*; give it *significance*. Why? If your life is nothing special, if there is no real meaning in your being alive, no real purpose in your being here, you feel unhappiness and despair. You may lose your very will to live. Why bother, what's the sense of it, anyway?

Frankl maintains that the *will to meaning is deeper and more powerful than any other human motivation*. Because our wills are free, because we are not merely propelled and aimlessly driven, and because we can think and make decisions, we want to know why, for whom and for what we exist. It is a characteristic constituent of human existence that it transcends itself, that it reaches out for something other than itself.

The following four observations, according to Frankl, may be used to prove that our basic motivation is our will to meaning:

- *The will to meaning is manifested in circumstances of destitution as well as in circumstances of plenty.*

Frankl found, in the concentration camps, that the questions most frequently asked were: 'What is the meaning of my life?' and 'What is this all about?' Only those who could find a meaning (a reason for which to live) in those supremely horrifying conditions were capable of taking up the challenge to survive with courage and dignity or to die heroically. There were also those that went on mindlessly, hoping against hope to survive. Others lost their will to live. More urgent than any other need (such as food or safety) was the need to find meaning and to go on believing in something in order not to fall victim to either apathy and mindlessness or to the dehumanising influences of camp life.

However, even in circumstances of prosperity and success, when all needs for ease and safety have been satisfied, people can feel depressed or feel unhappy if life is perceived as having no meaning. Frankl (2000:83–136) quotes numerous

investigations which show that people with no sense of fulfilment in their lives begin to suffer from noögenic (spiritual) neurosis or depression, despite their affluence or success.

- *The satisfaction of physical and psychological needs is not the ultimate aim of human striving, but rather the means to being free to strive towards spiritual goals.*

Frankl refers to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Maslow's view that the lower needs (such as safety and security) must first be satisfied before higher needs (such as self-actualisation) can emerge. This would imply that we first of all want to achieve a satisfactory standard of living before we tackle the task of finding meaning and purpose in life. The lower needs therefore take precedence and are more important than the higher needs. Frankl points out, however, that there is confusion here between the means and the end. Someone who is sick wants to be healthy, and becoming healthy would seem to be the most important objective in that sick person's life. Is this really the case? Further investigation could possibly reveal that the person wants to be healthy again in order to resume life with his or her loved ones and to continue doing the things important to that person. The real frustration is not that so-called lower needs may remain unsatisfied, but that illness and poverty may hamper the person's search for meaning.

Contrasting his view to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Frankl points out that Maslow's distinction between higher and lower needs does not take into account that when lower needs are not satisfied, a higher need, such as the will to meaning, may become more urgent. Just consider such situations as are met in death camps, or simply on deathbeds: who would deny that in such circumstances the thirst for meaning, even ultimate meaning, breaks through irresistibly?

- *The more we pursue happiness, the more it eludes us because happiness is the effect of the attainment of meaning and cannot be pursued as an end.*

Frankl states that a will to pleasure or need-satisfaction (postulated by the psychoanalysts) is not the primary tendency in human nature. He points out that happiness, joy or pleasure is experienced as a by-product of completing a task or of having experienced something of value. If we pursue happiness as a goal in itself, it will evade us. To seek happiness is to miss it precisely because it is the result of something good that we have experienced or achieved in our lives. Happiness is not a thing-in-itself that can be sought after like a goal. Similarly, a clear conscience, self-actualisation, and so on, are all effects that cannot be set as goals in themselves. Frankl points out that the more meaning we attain in our lives, the more we will be actualised. So too, happiness, like a good conscience and a sense of self-fulfilment, are by-products of the discovery of meaning. These are and must remain, the unintended effects of self-transcendence.

- *When the will to pleasure and the will to power are uppermost in our behaviour, this would be a sign that our will to meaning is frustrated.*

Frankl contends that when the will to pleasure or power is dominant in our behaviour, it is a sign of spiritual emptiness – there exists an existential or value vacuum in our lives. When we lack values to live by, our lives are experienced as empty and meaningless or as conflict-laden, confusing and futile. A frustrated, thwarted or suppressed will to meaning underlies many neurotic and emotional disturbances and depressive states. We can become psychologically *ill* if we feel worthless, and with no sense of meaning or spiritual direction in our lives.

KEY TERM

existential vacuum: a state of meaninglessness or spiritual emptiness characterised by a lack of purpose or direction in life

There are various masks and guises under which the **existential vacuum** appears. Sometimes the frustrated will to meaning is vicariously compensated for by a will to power, including the most primitive form of the will to power, namely, the will to money or possessions. In other cases, the place of frustrated will to meaning is taken by the will to pleasure. Sexual pleasures and fixations then become a way of escaping a frustrated will to meaning. We find expressions of a sense of spiritual emptiness in alcohol and drug abuse; in sexual and emotional addictions; in depressive states of suicidal despair; and in protests against a state of meaninglessness in aggressive and violent behaviour.

14.5.3 The meaning of life

Frankl points out that **meaning in life** can be found in three principal ways: the creative things we do, the uplifting things we experience, and the kind of attitude we have towards situations of unavoidable suffering. Each of these values will be discussed separately.

KEY TERM

meaning in life: that life never ceases to hold meaning and that meaning can be found in all circumstances, even in suffering and death

- *Creative values* are values we experience through what we contribute to life. Any creative contribution that we make allows us to feel meaningfully part of life. We have a task, a mandate or a goal in life, and therefore feel fulfilled as human beings. We feel that we are needed, and therefore, a person of worth. Our work, for example, is not just a job. It becomes a vocation.
- *Experiential values* are blessings we receive from life. Experiential values are manifested in what is good, beautiful and true. We are inspired, feel uplifted and moved by what is good, beautiful and genuine. These things (values) call forth our appreciation and gratitude. It involves us. The greatest experiential value, however, is love. Love brings us in vital touch with ourselves and with others whom we experience in all their uniqueness. Love can fill us with limitless devotion and arouse feelings of deep caring and responsibility.
- *Attitudinal values* are values that we experience through the right attitudes we have towards life, especially towards unavoidable suffering. Who of us can state that we will never suffer, never fail or never die? Suffering is suffering precisely because it is inevitable, says Frankl (see internet discussion: <https://mindbodydoc.wordpress.com/2010/04/22/in-search-of-the-meaning-of-it-all/>). To live is to suffer pain, failure and life-threatening events. We are not able to safeguard ourselves from these tragic facts of life. To find meaning in life is to find meaning in suffering. If there is a purpose in life at all, there must be a purpose in all such tragic events. Meaning is found in the fact that suffering does not deprive us of our freedom to decide how we will deal with it, that is, what attitude we will adopt towards our suffering. What matters

above all is the attitude we take toward suffering, the attitude in which we take our suffering upon ourselves.

Example

What Frankl describes as ‘the defiant power of the human spirit’ is graphically portrayed in the following account of a Holocaust survivor, a girl only fourteen years old at the time. Confronted by a member of the Gestapo, with the threat: ‘Don’t you realise that I have authority over life and death? Why don’t you kiss my boots and beg for your life?’, she courageously answered: ‘Whether I live or die is your decision. But that I do not beg for my life, is mine.’ (Shantall, 2002:203) She refused to humiliate herself; to be made a plaything of this Nazi’s cruelty and arrogance. So impressed was this powerful Nazi by the courage of a mere slip of a girl that he released her. Another survivor, after a bitter struggle to understand how it was possible for people to be so inhumanely cruel to their fellow human beings, and to come to grips with the meaning of his own senseless and cruel sufferings as a boy in the Nazi concentration camps, gave expression to the defiant power of the human spirit when he could eventually conclude: ‘It is possible to say: “This I will *not* do. It is *wrong*.”’ (Shantall, 2002:249)

If a situation cannot be changed, if suffering cannot be avoided, what is retained is the freedom to change ourselves, Frankl states. For what then counts and matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a tragedy into a personal triumph, to turn one’s predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation – just think of an incurable disease like an inoperable cancer – we are challenged to change ourselves. By changing ourselves (if we can no longer change our fate), by rising above and growing beyond ourselves, we exercise the most creative of all human potentials: we gain spiritual stature as *Ecce Homo* or remarkably exemplary human beings. *The moment suffering has a reason, or challenges us to rise above ourselves in becoming exemplary human beings, it loses its unbearable quality and it becomes another one of life’s tasks, one which – because it asks so much of us – offers us the opportunity to achieve moral greatness.*

Freud contended that if a number of very strongly differentiated human beings are subjected to the same amount of starvation, the imperative need for food will blot out all individual differences and, in their place, we shall see the uniform expression of the one unsatisfied instinct. But Frankl could bear witness to the opposite. The Nazi concentration camps were like huge human laboratories in which ideas such as these could be tested. What Frankl observed in the concentration camps was that some of the prisoners did, indeed, operate at an animal level as they scrambled for and fought over food to fight off their starvation. Others, however, reached the highest peaks of humanity. Frankl (2008:75) writes of this as follows:

We who have lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.

The freedom to live a life of worth and dignity remains, even in suffering.

Self-evaluation questions

- How are the three tenets of logotherapy, namely, the freedom of the will, the will to meaning and the meaning of life, interrelated?
- In which ways do we experience meaning?
- What does Frankl mean when he says that life is 'unconditionally meaningful'?
- According to Frankl, what meaning can be found in suffering, guilt and death?

Activity

What are the things in your life that you find meaningful and that make you believe that life is worth living? List them in order of priority.

What do you regard as *creative values* and *experiential values* in your own life? Can you recall instances in your life when you exercised and fulfilled *attitudinal values*?

Sort each of the things you listed as meaningful in your life under one of the above three categories.

14.6 The development of the personality

Does Frankl formulate an explicit theory of development and how does he view functioning on an optimal level of being?

Frankl did not provide a detailed developmental theory. According to him, the core or spiritual nucleus of the personality is present at birth since we are essentially spiritual creatures. The personality (that is, the behaviour whereby the person is recognised) develops throughout the lifespan.

The following conclusions can also be drawn about Frankl's view of development: At birth, life is given to us as an open possibility. We have not yet achieved anything, but the potential ability to do so is within us. What we are going to do with our lives and how our personality is going to be shaped, lie ahead of us. We are only truly ourselves once we have fully become, Frankl contended. Only at the end of our lives are we fully actualised. Our personalities are continually in the process of becoming. We ourselves are, however, the force behind what we become. Apart from our genetic endowment and in spite of the environmental factors that influence us, we are, ultimately, *self-determining*.

Frankl maintains that biologically we are the 'work' of our parents, but spiritually we are our own life's work.

The uniquely human (spiritual) characteristics such as self-awareness, conscience and responsible behaviour are phenomena that emerge during the course of development. When the child is put forward as being a complete being, the impression is created that a human being, like the young child, is a pleasure-seeking entity or, like the adolescent, primarily power-seeking. Frankl maintains, however,

that the person should be seen as a ‘time-Gestalt’. Only in maturity are we fully developed, and it is then that our uniquely human characteristics (such as freedom of will, search for meaning and value realisation) are fully manifest.

If we continue to search for pleasure and power as adults, then we can justifiably be called childish or immature or even neurotic. We have been frustrated in our search for meaning.

Self-evaluation question

- What does Frankl mean when he says the person must be seen as a ‘time- Gestalt’?

14.7 Optimal development

Activity

Describe the kind of person that you would like to be. What, to your mind, is the ideal that we should strive towards as human beings? What must we be like, what characteristics will we have, if we are all that we are meant to be; if we are the kind of people that command the respect and admiration of others?

Compare what you have written to some of the ideas Frankl himself had on the subject of optimal being.

According to Frankl, we attain optimal development when we function on the spiritual level, that is, when the spiritual side of our natures is fully evident. When we function on this level, we fully exercise our freedom of will and fulfil the basic human motive, namely, to search for, find and realise meaning in our lives. Although Frankl does not provide a systematic description of the characteristics of the mature or optimally developed personality, a number of deductions can be made from his writings.

Frankl points out that *optimally developed people, people who attain full human stature, form a minority because it takes courage and boldness to be optimally human.*

14.7.1 Self-determining action

Mature people have come to the realisation that they cannot attribute their fate to factors that coerce them from the inside (such as drives and needs) or that pressurise them from the outside (such as social circumstances). Optimally developed people continuously take a stand concerning themselves and their circumstances and freely decide what they should do and how they are to act. Schultz (1977:108) supports Frankl’s view in this respect and explains that, despite the fact that external factors have an effect on our lives, we have the choice to decide how we will react to those factors and in so doing, we can ensure that we remain psychologically healthy by making the choice that will enable us to overcome obstacles, instead of accepting our circumstances and blaming it on fate.

14.7.2 Realistic perception

Because optimally developed people can separate and distance themselves from what is happening to them, they have the ability to view matters objectively and critically. They can therefore perceive themselves and their circumstances realistically.

14.7.3 Humour

Mature people can distance themselves from their weaknesses and problems and can laugh at themselves. This kind of humour, Frankl maintains, is quite different from the banal joking and destructive ridicule indulged in by immature and irresponsible people.

14.7.4 Self-transcendence

From Frankl's theory it is clear that mature people are outward-looking rather than turned in on themselves. They want to be involved in whatever gives their lives meaning. They want to be faced with a task, to be challenged and to feel that they have a calling. It is in the nature of the healthy and fulfilled human being to be dedicated to values and ideals. Frankl (2014:34) says, for example: 'Man lives by ideals and values. *Human existence is not authentic unless it is lived in terms of self-transcendence.*'

Too great a focus on the self ultimately inhibits psychological health. We must move beyond self-absorption in order to achieve intimate and productive relationships with the world and with others.

For mature people, their own satisfaction and happiness are not the primary goals in life. These are incidental side-effects (spontaneous results) of meaning fulfilment which, to them, are primary.

It is precisely this continual search for and experience of discovered meaning that gives colour, in the form of enthusiasm, inspiration and joy, to the mature person's life. Healthy people always strive towards goals that give meaning to their lives.

14.7.5 Future-directedness

Frankl maintained that the will to meaning is, in essence, a future-directedness. We are forever reaching out *beyond* ourselves. We are most ourselves, he maintained, when we are so involved with a cause or with something and someone outside ourselves, that we *forget* ourselves. Self-consciousness and self-absorption are unhealthy states of being. It follows, therefore, that healthy or optimally developed people will be actively future-directed, because they are continually reaching out beyond a mere day-to-day existence. They have goals; a vision for the future.

It is precisely the beckoning future that makes every day a precious opportunity to meet that future. Mature people's future-directedness not only makes every day a unique opportunity, but also makes their past a rich treasure-house of fulfilled possibilities.

Death, therefore, is not a threat to mature people. Death threatens only those who have wasted their lives. For mature people, death is the meaningful conclusion of their lives – lives that were offered to them as precious opportunities and that they had used to the best of their abilities.

14.7.6 Work as a vocation

It is clear from Frankl's theory that mature people will regard their work or profession as a vocation. Through their work they respond to the demands of responsibility. For them, their work, like so many other life tasks, is an opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution to life.

14.7.7 Appreciation of goodness, beauty and truth

According to Frankl, mature people are receptive to the experiences of the good, the beautiful and the genuine that life offers them. They deeply enjoy and appreciate things such as literature, art, music and nature. Every day, every moment, each situation is ready with new meaning. Mature people are open to the new experiences offered to them each day. It should be noted that Rogers and Maslow describe similar ways of experiencing the world that characterise the mature person: Rogers calls it 'existential living' which is characterised by an openness to each new moment in life, while Maslow talks of the 'zestful experience of life'.

14.7.8 Respect and appreciation for the uniqueness of others

Mature people's attitude towards others is characterised by respect and appreciation. Mature people will never make other people objects for their own satisfaction or use others in order to achieve their own selfish ends. They want to have meaningful encounters with others and this can only happen when others are respected as individuals in their own right. Mature people will therefore also be free from prejudice and discrimination in their attitude towards others.

14.7.9 Meaning in suffering

An aspect of optimal development which Frankl highlights and which makes his contribution unique in this field, is his view that mature people have accepted the tragic facts of life, and have done so in a way that, far from diminishing their joy in life, their belief in the meaning of life is actually deepened. Frankl regards himself as a personal witness to the fact that meaning can be found in suffering, guilt and death. People who discover meaning in suffering have reached the highest peak of development. Their belief in the meaning of life is unshakeable: they can answer the question whether life has meaning, despite its tragic nature, with a triumphant 'Yes'! After his concentration camp experiences Frankl (2008:75) gave the following testimony:

The crowning experience of all, for the homecoming man, is the wonderful feeling that, after all he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear any more – except his God.

Shantall (2002), in her study of the lives of a highly select group of Holocaust survivors of the stature of someone like Viktor Frankl himself, highlighted the following features of spiritual maturity evidenced by them:

- They have reached a state of optimal humanness through choice. They attained spiritual maturity through the kind of choices they made when such choices were very costly (at the risk of their own lives) and difficult.
- They have a clear sense of who they are and what they were meant to be: they have *a clarified mission in life*.
- They have *dignity*, a sense of self-possession and integrity.
- They have an unequivocal and passionate, even *defiant* sense of right in the face of wrong. There is nothing lukewarm or passive in their attitude towards life.
- Their lives are earmarked by *an ongoing quest* – life is never at an end, there is always something more ahead of them,
- There is no sense of closure, or of final answers, no dogmatism in their attitude towards life – life remains unpredictable: they live comfortably with the fact of *uncertainty*.
- They keep *faith* with the future – the uncertainty of what may be ahead of them does not fill them with fear but with *hope*, the hope that the more final answers of life will be good ones, something to look forward to.
- All their lives are *infused with meaning* – they seem to be living in the presence of the Eternal, of that which they perceive as being forever ongoing and supremely meaningful.
- They live by their *conscience*. Their attitudes and actions are earmarked by *accountability*. They like themselves, since they have nothing to hide. Unlike Adam, hiding away, they have reversed his position of shame.

Self-evaluation questions

- Using Frankl's theory as a basis, how would you describe someone who functions on a subhuman level? How does the functioning of such a person differ from the functioning of someone who has obtained optimal functioning?
- Comparing Frankl's view of the mature person with the views of other theorists, what new features did Frankl add?
- Which features of the optimally developed or mature personality did Frankl highlight that you may not have considered before? How many of these features have you attained or want to attain?

KEY TERM

noögenic or existential neurosis: the *mental* or *spiritual* anguish and existential despair people suffer who see no meaning in their lives

14.8 Views on psychopathology

What are the unique contributions Frankl has made to the field of psychopathology?

Frankl made two special contributions to psychopathology, namely his description of what he calls **noögenic neurosis** and his emphasis on the human dignity of the psychiatric patient.

14.8.1 The noögenic neurosis

Frankl believes that *most people do not reach optimal development because they lack the courage to respond to the challenge of life to exercise their freedom responsibly*. Responsibility is evaded, avoided, shirked or minimised; their conscience becomes dulled. Seeking pleasure, power and position, they rush around madly trying to manage overfull schedules that leave them little time to think about their lives and where it is headed. Frankl refers to it as a kind of speed mania, which is symptomatic of the denial of the spiritual side of being human. The end result of this is the frustration of their basic will to meaning. Life becomes empty and meaningless – an existential vacuum (a spiritual emptiness) develops, which manifests itself in a spiritual or noögenic neurosis. This neurosis has reached collective dimensions in our time. People suffering from this collective neurosis have the following characteristics:

- *An unplanned, day-to-day existence*. People live aimlessly; they have no future goals, no real purpose in life.
- *A fatalistic attitude towards life*. People see themselves as helpless victims of their circumstances; they can do little to change their lives. Their fate is determined by heredity and environment. This is the approach of many nihilistic philosophers and psychologists.
- *Conformism*. In an effort to evade the stress of authenticity – of living lives of personal responsibility – people fall into the stream of conformism and do what most other people do. They are afraid to be different and to take a committed stand. They feel safe by going along with the crowd.
- *Totalitarianism*. In a totalitarian regime people are told what to do, what to believe and how they must behave. This type of system suits those who prefer to be blind followers, rather than having the task of working out what they themselves think and believe.

Frankl contends that ultimately, all these four symptoms can be traced back to man's fear of responsibility and his escape from having to give a full account of himself.

14.8.2 The human dignity of the psychiatric patient

A unique contribution by Frankl is that he reinstated the humanity of the mental patient. Those diagnosed as psychotic and mentally deficient are persons, just like anyone else. They too, says Frankl (2008:100), have human dignity:

An incurably psychotic individual may lose his usefulness but yet retain the dignity of a human being. This is my psychiatric credo.

Example

Frankl quotes numerous striking examples of schizophrenics and other seriously disturbed people who experience moments of crystal clear freedom from their psychosis. He mentions also, for example, that some of the people suffering from endogenous depression capitulate under the pressure of their depression while others exercise their spiritual freedom by adopting a controlling attitude towards their depression. Joan of Arc was a schizophrenic, but she still attained great heights as a saint! Psychosis or mental deficiency does not extinguish the humanness of the person so afflicted.

Frankl contends that the so-called life not worth living does not exist. And even the manifestations of psychosis or mental retardation conceal a real spiritual person, unassailable by mental disease. Only the possibilities of communication with the outside world are inhibited by the disease; but the nucleus of the person remains indestructible. And if this were not the case, it would be futile to be a psychiatrist.

Self-evaluation questions

- Describe the factors contributing to the development of a noögenic neurosis.
- How can the dignity of the psychiatric patient be maintained?

14.9 Implications and applications

What are the unique applications of Frankl's theory in the fields of research, psychotherapy, education and the handling of aggression?

We will consider some of the research that has been undertaken to substantiate Frankl's views. We will also consider some of the fields that can benefit from an application of Frankl's theory. Frankl's view that we are spiritual beings who have freedom of will and are responsible for our own lives has wide implications for any discipline dealing with human beings. We will, however, give particular attention to the therapeutic and educational application of Frankl's view of the human person.

14.9.1 Measurement and research

A variety of logotherapy tools have been introduced over the years to quantify and study the meaning construct. The best known of these are the Purpose in Life test, the Life Purpose Questionnaire, and the Seeking of Noetic Goals test. There is ample evidence for the internal consistency of the global scores generated by these measures, with coefficient alphas often reported in the .80s and in some instances exceeding .90 (Melton & Schulenberg, 2008).

Many studies have confirmed the correlation between meaning and psychological well-being. For example, meaning may contribute to an array of areas related to wellness, sense of identity and values, health-promoting behaviours (motivation to follow through) and stress inoculation (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Savolaine & Granello, 2002). In a review of the literature, Melton and Schulenberg (2008) noted that meaning is associated with a range of outcomes such as stable mood and less psychological distress, more proactive and sociable behaviour, and more favourable attitudes toward life and the self.

In South Africa, Shantall (2002) did research on the meaning of suffering among South African-based survivors of the Nazi concentration and death camps.

In terms of mental health problems, many studies have proved the correlation between a sense of meaninglessness in life and various mental afflictions. The idea that meaninglessness is associated with alcohol and drug abuse is well supported

in the literature (Marsh, Smith, Pick & Saunders, 2003). Logotherapy has been successfully applied in the treatment of alcohol problems (Crumbaugh, 1980, 1981; Crumbaugh, Wood & Wood, 1980; Henrion, 2002; Hutzell, 1984). Logotherapy has also proved effective in cases of depression, anxiety, and psychoses, as well as despair associated with incurable illness (see Fabry, 1994; Frankl, 2004; Lukas, 2000; Lukas & Hirsch, 2002).

Logotherapy has applicability in a growing number of areas, such as rehabilitation (Ososkie & Holzbauer, 2004; Starck, 1982); mental retardation and developmental disabilities (Hinsburger, 1989, 1990; Schulenberg, 2004); pastoral psychology (Graber, 2004; Leslie, 1965; Welter, 1987); aging (Kimble, 2000); family therapy, relationship counselling (Crumbaugh & Henrion, 2004; Lantz, 1993; Winters, 2002); and daily life/work-related issues (Crumbaugh, 1973; Pattakos, 2010).

For a most recent and comprehensive source of empirical articles relevant to logotherapy, the reader is referred to Batthyany and Gutmann's (2006) annotated bibliography.

14.9.2 Psychotherapy

Frankl calls his specific psychotherapeutic approach *logotherapy* (which he sometimes also refers to as the 'Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy'). Frankl believes that *there is no such thing as psychotherapy unconcerned with values, only one that is blind to values. A psychotherapy which not only recognises man's spirit, but actually starts from it may be termed logotherapy.*

Literally translated 'logotherapy' means 'therapy or healing through meaning'.

The goal of logotherapy, therefore, is to help people discover or rediscover meaning in their lives. Logotherapy is the most positive of all therapies for the reason that it addresses the negative and tragic issues of life, not as lamentable afflictions we are all doomed to suffer, but as tasks we are challenged to embrace, that is, to overcome in a spiritually mature and victorious way.

KEY TERM

Socratic dialogue:

a highly challenging and questioning logotherapeutic technique evoking critical and creative thought and which allows the person to discover and realise the meaning; the unique responsibilities and tasks of his or her own life

The essence of logotherapy is to challenge people to become aware of things which require them to be responsible and which demand their love, care or involvement. People are not advised as to what they should find meaningful, but they are challenged to find what is meaningful to them. This is done by way of the **Socratic dialogue**. This is a highly challenging and questioning technique evoking critical and creative thought. By way of the Socratic dialogue, people come up with their *own* answers. They take lessons from their past; take a new look at their futures; come to realise what their lives are requiring of them right now, instead of lamenting the fact that life has been less than fair to them.

Logotherapy is not problem-centred but meaning-centred. People are challenged to consider the meaning of their lives, to discover the responsibilities and duties that

they alone can perform. The focus is not on their problems but rather on their freedom to deal with them. Even in situations that cannot be changed, they have the freedom to take a stand against those situations by way of the attitudes they choose to adopt. Often the purpose is simply to help people to view an existing situation differently.

Example

Frankl once asked a man who felt that he could not go on living after his wife had died, 'How do you think your wife would have felt had you been the first to die?' When he replied, 'It would have been unbearable for her', it was easy for Frankl to bring him to the realisation that the meaning of his survival was to save his wife from suffering. This realisation made him aware of the many other meaningful moments his life had and what tasks in life there were still left for him to fulfil. His suffering had taken on *meaning*, the meaning to bear his suffering bravely and with dignity.

Frankl sometimes used a kind of shock therapy by asking people who complained about the meaninglessness of life the question: 'Why don't you commit suicide?' Usually people replied that it was impossible to do so because their spouses and children would be left helpless, and that there was one thing or another that still had to be attended to. The shocking confrontation with the possibility of death caused people to discover that there was meaning in their lives after all.

KEY TERMS

paradoxical intention: a logotherapeutic technique designed to break the vicious circle of hyper-intention by encouraging the person to wish or intend, with much humour, what the person fears, thereby deflating or defusing the fear

dereflection: a logotherapeutic technique designed to shift the attention of a person away from obsessive hyper-reflection and to focus on something meaningful instead

Other than the Socratic dialogue, there are two other specific therapeutic techniques employed in logotherapy, namely, **paradoxical intention** and **dereflection**. These are especially applicable in the case of phobias and obsessive-compulsive neuroses that are characterised by over-anxious expectations and compulsions. These techniques combat the debilitating and vicious circle effects of *hyper-intention* and *hyper-reflection* based on *anticipatory anxiety*.

Example

Paradoxical intention

A woman has the anxious expectation that she will blush in front of an audience. In her anxious efforts not to blush, she actually does so. The technique of paradoxical intention consists in advising her to decide to do the opposite of what she actually wants (namely, not to blush), or to put it differently, to attempt to do precisely that which she fears (namely, to blush). She is advised to form the paradoxical intention that she is going to blush. She is to say to herself: 'Come on then, you want to blush, then blush!' Taking this humorous stand towards her fear, she may find that she is actually *unable* to blush! The anticipatory anxiety that she is going to blush will be as good as paralysed. By laughing at her fear and ridiculing it, she gains mastery over her fear. She is no longer entangled in her fear and ruled by it, but distanced from it. Not the fear, but she is now in control.

Elisabeth Lukas (2000:100), another famous logotherapist, points out that what is involved in the case of paradoxical intention is 'a magnificent act of decision of the noetic dimension to no longer give in to the misplaced anxieties of the psyche and to outsmart them with a humorous trick.'

Example

Dereflection

Another patient suffers from insomnia. Over-conscious of not being able to fall asleep, he does not sleep at all. Here the man is asked to forget about himself and about his problem of not being able to fall asleep but to concentrate on something else instead. Worrying about not being able to sleep, he concentrates so much on not being able to fall asleep and on the detrimental consequences of the lack of sleep, that this worry actually prevents him from sleeping. When, however, he concentrates on things other than himself and his problem, he *automatically* falls asleep!

Two specific spiritual abilities, namely *self-detachment* and *self-transcendence*, are utilised by the techniques of paradoxical intention and dereflection. Through paradoxical intention, clients distance themselves from their problems; they take up a position *vis-à-vis* themselves and their problems and gain some perspective, even laughing at what seemed so serious before. Through dereflection, clients are directed away from their problems and are encouraged to reach out towards someone or something other than themselves. By means of paradoxical intention, clients ridicule their symptoms rather than trying either to run away from them (phobias) or to fight them (obsessive compulsions). Through dereflection, clients are enabled to ignore their neurosis by focusing their attention away from themselves. They are directed to a life full of potential meanings and values that have a specific appeal to their personal potentialities. Clients are liberated from their self-preoccupation and are made aware of the fact that they are spiritual beings who have freedom and responsibility.

What transpires is essentially more than a change of behaviour patterns; rather, it is *an existential reorientation*.

Self-evaluation questions

- Describe the three different techniques used in logotherapy.
- Which specific human abilities are utilised by each of these techniques?

14.9.3 Education

Frankl points out that today's permissive society in Western countries is an unhealthy reaction formation against the moral and ethical authoritarianism and totalitarianism of the preceding era. Permissiveness has become a freedom without direction, which could be the cause of juvenile delinquency, drug addiction and the numerous youth cults of our present-day world.

As far as education is concerned, *the freedom of the youth is incomplete if they are not also confronted with and inspired by values and ideals*. The youth must be taught to exercise responsibility. They should be encouraged to fulfil the manifold tasks; to take up the many challenges; to embrace the many opportunities their lives present and offer to them.

Frankl believes that because a will to meaning is inherent to human nature, youth will want to accept responsibility for their own lives. *Without a sense of responsibility (something to strive towards and to devote themselves to), the youth will experience their existence as meaningless. Their freedom will be arbitrary – aimless and without purpose.*

Education thus involves calling the youth to task. It follows that an autocratic educational system will rob the youth of personal responsibility and initiative, just as a too-permissive system will fail to challenge the youth to take up their lives in a unique and responsible way.

14.9.4 The interpretation and handling of aggression

As a potential inherent to our freedom of choice, Frankl accepts the Freudian notion of an unmistakable and pronounced evil (brutally selfish) inclination in human nature. However, unlike Freud who believed that aggression is an inherent part of the human make-up, Frankl saw aggression, along with depression and addiction, as the outflows of a *frustrated or suppressed will to meaning*. Hitler could not have done what he did if he did not trample his conscience underfoot, Frankl believes. Aggression and senseless violence are signs of mental deviation; a distortion of the human face. It is *inhuman*. It is a pathology and is contrary to what human beings in their freedom are called upon to be, namely, responsible, highly moral and exemplary people. He observed in the concentration camps that it was only a minority that rose to the level of human greatness, but these few are proof that it is possible for anyone to do so since this capability is embedded in human nature. We become what we constantly choose to be. Whether we become what we were *meant* (and created) to be or not, is up to us. The choice is ours.

Frankl also accepts the contention of behaviourists that we are very much influenced by the kind of society (environment) in which we live. Violence breeds violence. However, unlike these theorists, Frankl contends that we have the freedom and ability to not only control our aggressive impulses, but to also counteract and overcome them. We can also resist the negative pressures and conditioning that a hostile environment exerts upon us; and even more than that, we can change that environment for the better.

As a victim of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, and trapped in the hostile and violent confines of a Nazi death camp, Frankl (1959) experienced feelings of apathy, irritability and anger. But, by choice, he could overcome these feelings and act in the way required of him. He also witnessed the fact that prisoners succumbed to the terrible pressures that the camp environment exercised upon them. In the fierce battle to survive, many prisoners abrogated the humane values of decency and compassion. Most remarkable, however, was the fact that there were those prisoners who could suppress their feelings of hostility and moral apathy and who, even under the most adverse conditions imaginable, could continue the exercise of moral values by acting unselfishly, and by expressing their concern and helpfulness towards others. Prisoners were stripped of everything and left with nothing but their own naked existence. Deprived of every satisfaction and security, with nothing

to hold onto anymore, it proved to still be possible to ‘remain brave, dignified and unselfish’. As a result of these remarkable experiences, Frankl (1968:67) came to the following conclusion:

Everything might be taken away from the prisoner, but this freedom remained to him; and it remained to him literally to the last moment, to the last breath. It was the freedom to conduct oneself ‘this way or that way’.

Frankl regards the Nazi concentration and death camps as living laboratories in which human nature could be fully exposed. There the best and worst in human nature came to the fore. There were the gas chambers that were invented and mercilessly used to murder people. But there were also those who entered those gas chambers upright, with a prayer on their lips. On the basis of these observations in his capacity as a prisoner of Auschwitz, Frankl (1968:110) reached the following conclusion:

What then is man? He is a being who continuously decides what he is: a being who equally harbours the potential to descend to the level of a beast or to ascend to the life of a saint.

In terms of the handling of aggression, therefore, it is a question of whether we give aggressive impulses free rein, or whether we master our anger and behave according to the dictates of human conscience.

Example

Frankl provides the example of Socrates who confessed to having criminal leanings in his make-up; despite this fact, however, Socrates became a great exponent of the law. Then there is the example of identical twins who inherited the same genes and who were subjected to the same environmental influences and upbringing. In adulthood, one became a criminal; the other, a criminologist! Frankl maintains that a vestige of freedom remains even in the mentally ill person. He cites the example of a paranoid schizophrenic who chose to forgive his imaginary persecutors, in comparison to another who chose to murder them!

It is not a question, therefore, whether we have aggressive impulses or not; or whether we were nurtured in a good environment or subjected to the influences of a bad environment. Rather, what we choose to do in the face of the aggressive impulses and how we deal with the influences of the environment we find ourselves in, are the important issues.

The nature of our choices will determine what happens to us: whether we grow in moral stature, or whether we lapse into evil-doing and become decadent and violent.

Activity

Contemplate the following question:

How can Frankl’s theory be applied to combat crime and violence in South Africa?

Arrange a workshop, based on the principles of logotherapy, to serve as an outreach in a community suffering under the onslaught of unchecked crime and violence.

14.10 Evaluation of the theory

What contribution does Frankl's theory make to a better understanding of human functioning?

Frankl's theory can be evaluated in various ways. From the point of view of the positivistic philosophy of science, it can no longer be contended that it falls short of the ideal of science. Research on the tenets and principles of logotherapy and its applications and uses, based on sound experimental design, have become vast. One can ask, however, whether the spiritual phenomena such as meaning and faith can be subjected to experimental and empirical investigation. It is in this respect that a new research orientation or paradigm, a method and approach of a different order than positivistic or quantitative research approaches, is called for to encompass phenomena that will not lend themselves to measurement and experimental manipulation. Shantall (2002) used a phenomenological research approach and a heuristic method of research in her own study of the meaning of suffering among Holocaust survivors. These are some of the qualitative methods that have become known as new paradigm research (Reason & Rowan, 1981).

It can be considered whether a more scientifically valid experiment could have been designed as precise in every detail as the Nazi concentration and death camps. The experimental conditions to which its human subjects or victims were subjected were made precisely uniform. All subjects were treated exactly the same: they were all stripped of every security and sense of meaning and worth that people ordinarily experience under normal circumstances. What would the human being prove to be when subjected to such conditions? The observations Frankl made while he himself was part of the experiment of other people's inhumanity to others are, in the words of Gordon Allport (cited in Frankl, 1959), worth taking note of.

Not only has the validity of Frankl's views been proved in a flood of ever increasing research in the area of meaning, but its effects in the real lives of people exposed to logotherapy have proved to be profound. Students who study logotherapy testify without fail that it has changed their lives. Millions upon millions of people are still deeply impressed in the reading of *Man's Search for Meaning*, a book that remains a best seller to this day. The principles of logotherapy can be seen as the laws for meaningful living and as an illustration of the art of optimal living. Frankl's theory vividly illuminated the uniquely human (meaning) dimension of being, a level of functioning earmarked by a freedom of choice. This freedom has been clearly illustrated to be a freedom to responsibility. Human functioning, according to Frankl's theory, is neither delivered to the blind forces of physical drives and the relentless push of emotional needs, nor under the tyranny of oppressive environmental forces. Rather, human functioning is seen in terms of the mastery of self-control and self-determination. With this orientation, a new note of optimism has been sounded in the field of personality theories.

Frankl's theory can also be considered in terms of its value for our current world situation. In fact, it can be said that we live in an age desperately in need and in search of meaning. Frankl diagnosed a new type of neurosis, namely noögenic neuroses, earmarked by existential emptiness and a sense of futility, purposeless and meaninglessness. In such a value vacuum, wars, terrorism, violent group and family conflicts flourish. People take recourse in drugs, alcohol, sexual and other forms of indulgence in an effort to escape the emptiness of their own lives. Frankl called it the fight/flight syndrome. However dark this picture flashed on our TV screens every day, there is also an upsurge in efforts to restore law and order and human rights; to assist victims of war and terror; to reach out to communities suffering the effects of natural disasters, epidemics, extreme weather conditions and starvation.

As he was wheeled into the operating room after a heart attack at the age of ninety-two, an operation that failed to save his life, Frankl held to his breast a new edition of one of his books that appeared that very day. Its title can be seen as the theme for our world today: *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*.

Frankl did not intend to develop a complete personality theory. He simply wanted to emphasise some ideas that are neglected in traditional psychology. He compared himself to a dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant – Freud – and is therefore able to see further than the giant himself. Frankl (1968:132) says of his own work:

What I have attempted to do with existential analysis and logotherapy is to supplement, not to supplant, the existing psychotherapies and, thereby, to make the underlying image of man into a whole, a total image of true man, an image in all its dimensions, thus doing justice to that reality which belongs only to man and is called human existence.

The importance of Frankl's theory is to be found in the fact that it highlights the spiritual dimension of human existence, an aspect of the human personality that has been largely ignored by traditional psychology. For this reason, Gordon Allport (in his foreword to Frankl, 1959) has called logotherapy 'the most significant psychological movement of our day'.

Activity

Contemplate and write down your answers to the following questions:

- What is your own view of the human person – your own philosophy of life?
- How do *you* view the human personality? What contribution do you believe Frankl's view has made to your own understanding of the human personality?
- After having studied Frankl's views on human nature, do you understand yourself and others better? What issues are still unclear to you? What criticisms, if any, do you have of Frankl's theory?

Self-evaluation question

- According to Frankl, what does it mean to attain full human stature?

14.11 Suggested reading

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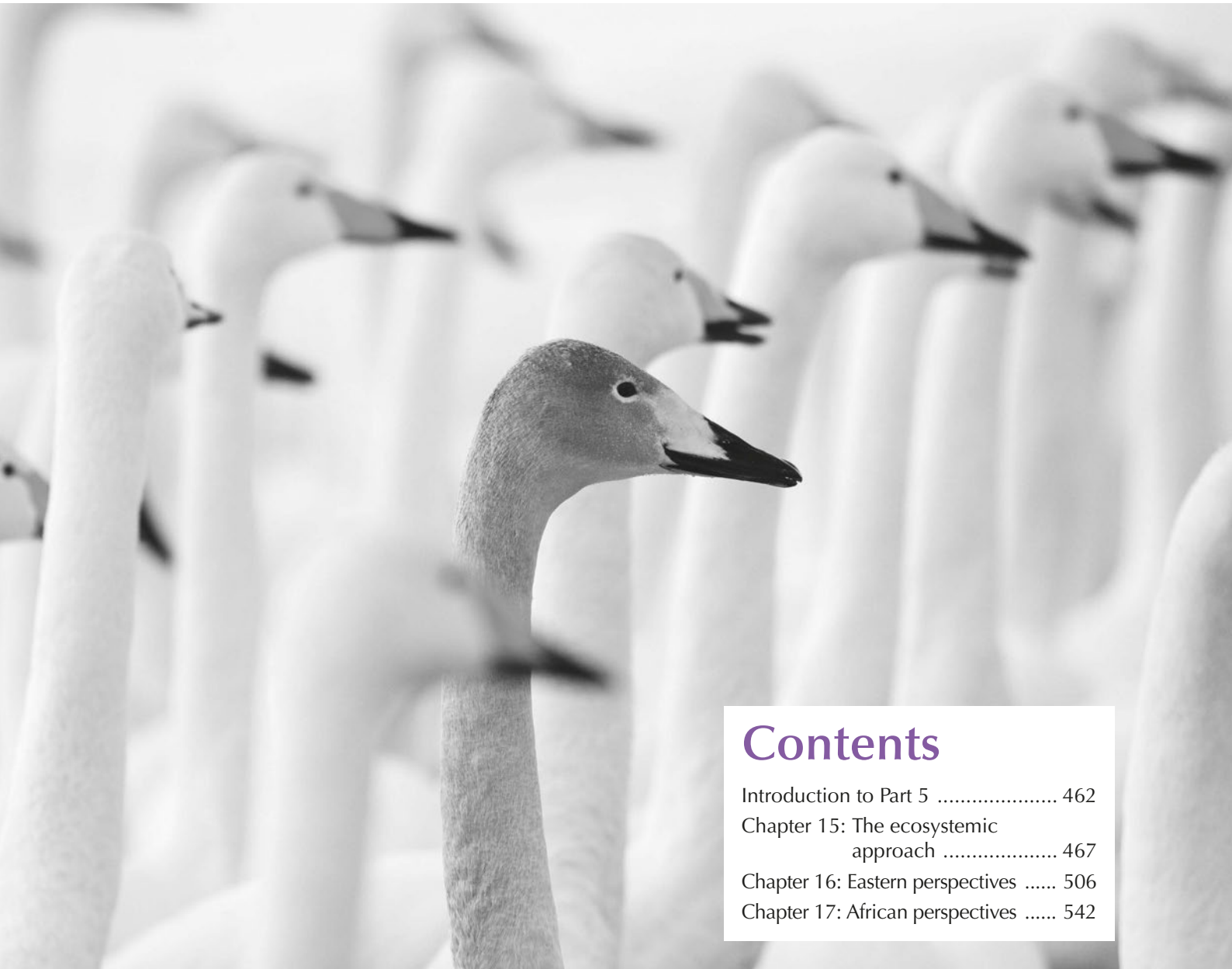
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PART 5

Socially contextualised approaches

Desmond Painter



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Introduction to Part 5

1. Background

In the preceding sections of this book you were introduced to a range of personality theories, each of which represented different conceptions of the nature of personhood, the relationship between individual and society, as well as how knowledge is produced in psychology. Moving from depth psychology to behavioural and learning theory approaches, and from there to person-oriented approaches, it might well have seemed to you as if personology, rather than being a range of different theoretical accounts of the same object of study – the aspect of personhood psychologists refer to as the ‘personality’ – consists of a range of perspectives that each postulates its own object of study, erected upon different foundational notions of what exists (ontology), what can be known (epistemology), and how one should go about knowing it (methodology).

You would not be wrong in thinking this. Psychoanalysis, behaviourism and humanistic psychology indeed are not simply three different theories of one stable, unchanging scientific object, namely the person and its personality. They, in fact, assume different, mostly contradictory conceptions of the person, and of the location, structure and functioning of the personality. We can refer here to different **constructions** rather than different theories of personhood. In other words, psychology *produces forms of personhood*, it doesn’t just describe and explain pre-existing forms of personhood. What is more, the three historical constructions of personhood we have discussed in this book have had a kind of *cultural boomerang effect*: they have fed back into our everyday common sense, infiltrating and even dominating the vocabularies we use to talk about ourselves and others. Ask yourself: how much of the concepts you use to make sense of your and others’ behaviour is informed by your culture or religion rather than by some form of psychology? They are increasingly becoming tools with which individuals are monitored, managed and assisted in various different contexts – in the military, in schools, in the workplace and, through the rapid development of popular psychology in the media, in our everyday lives as well.

Take Freud and psychoanalysis as an example. Whether the unconscious as a structure and processes like repression and projection objectively exist or not, they have accrued a certain *discursive reality* – that is, a reality in language – simply due to the fact that these have become common sense terms and are therefore used by people to talk about their own experience and behaviour and that of others. Stated differently, Freud, Jung, Skinner, Rogers and others are significant figures, not primarily because they discovered objective things about our personalities. They are significant because *we discover ourselves*, and become who we are, historically and culturally speaking, by describing ourselves and our ‘development’ with their concepts and theories. We have all, to some extent, become psychoanalytic subjects and it is very difficult and perhaps impossible to fully escape this discursive reality and the hold it has over our psychological lives.

To summarise this idea, we may say that rather than discovering and describing a pre-existing thing called ‘personality’, psychology has produced and will keep on producing different constructions of personhood, each standardising a particular set of parameters for self-understanding and for psychological intervention in the form of a ‘theory of personality’. It is this *process of psychological construction and standardisation*, and the understanding and interventions it makes possible across different theories and their application in different contexts, that you have been reading about thus far in this book.

But, despite the significant differences between these perspectives, emphasising either determinism or freedom, or nature or nurture, for example, in the shaping of an individual life, they also share something very important. They all locate psychology within the individual. Now, perhaps at this point, you are thinking that it is obvious that psychology should be **located within the individual**; *where else?* – but this obviousness is itself the product of a cultural assumption. The problem is not that psychology takes individual lives seriously. One would certainly expect psychology to do exactly this; and it is an interest in individual lives, your own as well as those of others, that has probably moved you to study psychology in the first place. No, the problem is rather a longstanding, much criticised tendency in psychology to, firstly, abstract and remove individual lives out of their relational, social and cultural contexts of existence; and secondly, to treat this abstracted, individualised notion of the person as an ahistorical, acultural, and ultimately universal model of psychological personhood and functioning (Mills, 2015; Parker, 2007).

To be more specific, we are talking about a set of Western cultural assumptions, producing a conception of personhood that has profoundly shaped modern psychology.

This cultural assumption, which we may refer to here as *individualism*, has led to a misrepresentation of psychological reality as such (ignoring the relational and systemic contexts in which we become and function as persons) and also of particular psychological realities: those of women, for example, or black people, gay people, non-Western people, etc. In order to pay attention to individual lives, it may be necessary for psychology to abandon its foundational individualism and its associated neglect and distortion of individual lives as they are lived in different contexts.

2. Beyond individualism in psychology

According to Sloan (2009:59), theorising about personality in mainstream psychology, precisely because of its individualism, has often had the consequence of *maintaining the status quo*. Firstly, although personality is theorised as being an ahistorical and a universal category in particular, it is always ‘associated with a particular social order’ – with Western culture, for example, or with globalising capitalism – of which the interests are both reflected in it and served by it.

Secondly, mainstream theories of personality, again because of its individualism, often misleads us to define problems in our lives as private matters to be solved by personal growth or self-actualisation. This diverts attention away from seeking collective solutions to problems that are actually social, not personal, in origin. Individualistic theories also forget that the luxury and leisure to be concerned with personal growth are available mostly to the privileged classes in modern societies. Massive social change would be necessary before the vast majority of citizens could dedicate themselves to psychological well-being in the manner implied by many theories. In short, individualistic perspectives tend to blame individuals for their problems and leave social inequality unchallenged.

Challenging individualism in psychology is therefore not only an internal debate about how we theorise and produce knowledge in psychology. Beyond matters of ontology, epistemology and methodology, overcoming individualism has always been a *political* matter as well. Politics in this sense does not refer to the formal structures and processes of representation in a society, but to the structure and reproduction of inequality – and how psychology and other bodies of knowledge and forms of professional practice either entrench or challenge such inequality. Overcoming individualism is thus an attempt to *challenge psychology's neglect of the societal dimensions of our lives* and its subsequent complicity with how inequality becomes invisible and is reproduced, and to develop alternative theories that take our social and cultural embeddedness into account, and 'that guides our attention to the aspects of personhood that have something to do with both systematic suffering and emancipation from it' (Sloan, 2009:68).

One of the key insights that have fuelled critiques of psychology's individualism has indeed been political in nature: psychology's conception, across the different traditions, of the person as a universal psychological entity, characterised by universal psychological structures and processes, has systematically erased from view the way persons are constituted, and personal lives shaped, in relation to ideologies of gender, class, culture and race. One can be even blunter about this. The person we encounter in psychology, and that assumes itself to be universal and is presented to us in personality theories as *a neutral model of psychological functioning*, is to a large extent in fact a white, middle-class, heterosexual American man ... This is a slight exaggeration, of course, but the point is that psychology's model of personhood, whether constructed in psychoanalytic, behaviourist or humanist ways, is not universal, but is deeply rooted in particular contexts. This means the experiences and personal struggles, and indeed the personhood, of women, the poor, black people, homosexuals or people with other sexual and gender orientations, Asians, Africans and others in the 'global South', are largely still rendered invisible in psychology. Worse even, inappropriate models of personhood, ones that are irrelevant or even damaging because of their sexist, racist, etc. assumptions, are being *imposed upon individuals* in contexts where they mystify rather than illuminate those individuals' everyday material and psychological struggles.

Critical psychology, a loosely defined tradition within psychology that attempts to both critique the mainstream psychology's foundational assumptions and to develop alternative approaches that are more responsive to diverse forms of human experience and suffering, is therefore replete with attempts to develop more contextual accounts of personhood. **Feminist psychology**, for example, studies and critiques the gendered assumptions that permeate mainstream psychology: how women are misrepresented or neglected in theories of personality development, or how constructions of woman in psychology (think about psychoanalytic theories of hysteria and penis envy) lend support to the unequal treatment of women in different areas of life or to a *pathologisation* (treating their social suffering as an expression of personal pathology) of their experiences. Marxist approaches to psychology, especially in the area of personality theory, interrogate how capitalist and consumerist values permeate mainstream theories in psychology, and how psychology comes to function as an important ideology of personhood and a technology of social control in contemporary capitalist societies. As an alternative, anti-capitalist approaches to personhood pay attention to class experience, to how precarious work conditions, poverty and social marginality feed individual alienation and misery, and how solidarity and social change could be achieved (Parker, 2007; 2015).

Important from a South African perspective, critical psychology also focuses on psychology's **historical complicity with racism** and its tendency to neglect black experiences, and especially the alienation experienced by black people due to the colonialism and legacies of white supremacy (Richards, 2010). Here one should mention the contribution of the psychiatrist and revolutionary Frantz Fanon, who developed a powerful account of *the experience of blackness as a form of dehumanising alienation* in his 1952 book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Because whiteness is held forth as the norm, the experience of being black is associated with being less than human. Colonial racism, for Fanon, does not just entail economic inequality and cultural destruction, but is a form of *psychic violence*. Although not a theory of personality, it is an account of black personhood, as it is forced to define and experience itself from the vantage point of a normative whiteness, and it continues to inspire critical accounts of race and racism in psychology, including critiques of psychology's own complicity with the denigration of blackness. These are only a few examples of attempts to overcome individualism in psychology.

3. From individual to ecosystem

Rather than presenting another overarching meta-theoretical perspective, this final section of the book introduces you to some attempts to challenge and overcome the individualism characterising much of psychology and personology, as described in the section above. *The ecosystemic approach* represents one of the most important attempts in psychology to develop a theoretical language with which the socially embedded, relational and especially emergent nature of psychological life can be described, without psychological or sociological reductionism. Thereafter the role of culture in the construction of models and experiences of personhood is explored.

This is done in relation to two perspectives on personhood and the self, each with a long history, but extremely neglected in Western-centric psychology: the **Eastern perspective** and **African perspective** respectively. Apart from the intrinsic value of each of these perspectives, the hope is that these chapters will also alert you to the larger and still remaining challenge to rethink psychology in relation to the diversity of experiences and traditions of personhood, ancient as well as emerging, to be found in the world today.

4. Suggested reading

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Richards, G (2010). *Putting psychology in its place: Critical historical perspectives*. (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.

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Chapter 15

The ecosystemic approach

Cora Moore

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15.1 Outcomes

- Understand the epistemological principles underlying the ecosystemic approach.
- Explain how the ecosystemic approach moves away from Newtonian thinking.
- Understand the difference between first-order and second-order cybernetics, and between constructivism and social constructionism.
- Explain the dynamics and development of systems.
- Explain ecosystemic views on ideal and non-ideal functioning.
- Understand the practical implications of the ecosystemic approach for various contexts and specifically for psychotherapy.
- Compare the ecosystemic perspective with other personality theories.
- Evaluate the ecosystemic approach.

15.2 Background

Why do we refer to the ecosystemic perspective as an ‘approach’ and not a ‘theory’?

KEY TERMS

ecosystemic: an approach that presupposes a way of looking at human functioning where the focus is on systems, and where ecological and cybernetic principles provide the point of departure

epistemology: refers to a particular way of thinking, which determines how we know and understand the world around us

The **ecosystemic approach** is not a specific personality theory, but is an integration of certain fields of study, such as system theory, ecology and cybernetics. These fields of study have a number of overlapping assumptions and their epistemologies are compatible. More importantly, they all emphasise epistemological principles. An **epistemology** refers to *a particular way of thinking, which determines how we know and understand the world around us* (Bateson, 1979; Tomm, 1984; Charlton, 2010). Because the ecosystemic approach emphasises a particular ‘way of thinking’ or ‘way of knowing’, and this ‘way of thinking or knowing’ rests on certain underlying assumptions and principles, certain ecosystemic concepts describe these assumptions and principles. These concepts then serve as mechanisms for describing human functioning.

It is also important to note that the ecosystemic approach in psychology developed in the context of family therapy, and that the approach is therefore encountered primarily in a therapeutic context. However, the ecosystemic approach does represent a ‘set’ of principles whereby any facet of human functioning can be observed and described, so it is not confined to the therapeutic context.

As the term *ecosystemic* implies, this approach presupposes a way of looking at human functioning where the focus is on *systems*, and where *ecological* and *cybernetic* principles provide the point of departure.

KEY TERM

ecology: the fundamental assumption that all things in nature are related to one another in a complex but systematic way

We can regard **ecology** as the fundamental assumption that all things in nature are related to one another in a complex but systematic way (Keeney, 1984). Think, for example, of a forest, and how the organisms in the forest coexist. Ferns, for example, grow in the shadow of large trees; and rotting leaves and living organisms work together to make the soil fertile so that things can continue growing in it.

However, intruders, such as parasite plants, have a negative influence on the entire system, which may necessitate certain adaptations within it. Now, if you wanted to learn something about the wonder of a forest, it would make no sense for you to study various elements of the forest separately. You would have to know more about the interaction, cooperation and counteraction of subsystems within the larger context.



All the organisms in a forest coexist as part of the ecological system

Source: Matt Tilghman. Shutterstock

Cybernetics deals with relationships, patterns and communication systems (Baron, 2014) and the principles that govern the distribution of information. An ecosystemic epistemology in psychology therefore assumes that the emphasis is on discovering the *communication networks in systems and subsystems* and on the transactions that take place in a particular context. With humans, the communication networks occur in the form of language because language, both verbal and non-verbal, is the most important means of communicating meanings and ideas among people (Anderson & Goolishian, 1990; Fourie, 1991). As Bateson (1972; 1979) puts it, the ecosystemic approach has to do with *an ecology of ideas* in systems.

Self-evaluation question

- On which three ‘pillars’ does the ecosystemic approach rest? Explain.

15.2.1 The development of ecosystemic thinking

How did ecosystemic thinking develop?

To achieve an adequate perspective on the ecosystemic approach, we have to give some thought to how other approaches influenced the development of ecosystemic thinking. We therefore start by giving attention to *Newtonian thinking*, as it is known, and how ecosystemic thinking moved away from this. We then discuss briefly the influence of *general system theory*, *cybernetics*, *second-order cybernetics* and *constructivism* (which is present in all the others) on the development of ecosystemic thinking.

Newtonian thinking

Scientific thinking was dominated by the so-called *Newtonian epistemology* or ‘way of thinking’ until the end of the nineteenth century. Like any other epistemology, Newtonian thinking is also based on a particular **ontology** or set of views on what exists and what humans can, therefore, know.

KEY TERMS

ontology: a set of views on what exists and what humans can therefore know

Following the same path as the philosopher Aristotle, Newton held an ontological view according to which there is an objective reality that can be discovered and that the world is therefore understandable, controllable and predictable. Such a view assumes that reality can be studied through objective observation, and that ‘the truth’ can be discovered. Accordingly, Newtonian thinking rests on the following three basic assumptions:

- *reductionism* or *atomism* according to which phenomena or objects can be reduced to their most basic elements as a means of understanding the whole phenomenon or object
- *linear causality* according to which it is accepted that the elements are bound to one another by cause and effect
- *objectivity* according to which the truth can only be discovered if phenomena or objects are observed in an objective way and are not influenced by the observer (Fourie, 1991; Schwartzman, 1984).

This way of thinking had an influence on psychology, and is particularly evident in *structuralism*, *functionalism* and *behaviourism*. (See Chapter 2.)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, various theories in the natural sciences, such as Planck's quantum theory, Einstein's theory of relativity and Heisenberg's 'principle of uncertainty', brought the idea of the existence of an objective reality into question (Auerswald, 1985; 1987). The notion of a relative reality had also started to gain a foothold in the human sciences, and in psychology people were paying attention to the view that 'reality' is a function of the method of observation and of the observer's ideas about the observation (Fourie, 1994).

Just think for a moment here about George Kelly's emphasis, in his personality theory, on constructive alternativism; about the role Carl Rogers gives to subjective observation; and about the recognition given to the role of cognitive factors in social learning theory.

As you will see later in this discussion, the ecosystemic approach leans especially heavily on constructivism. According to constructivism, 'reality' is created by the observer, and there can thus be no question of one correct, objective reality. This view recognises, instead, the existence of different, parallel realities.

Clearly, then, the ecosystemic approach implies a movement away from Newtonian reductionism or atomism towards an emphasis on whole entities or systems. Instead of looking for linear causality, the ecosystemic approach highlights the interactional patterns that are formed through the relationships between parts (Auerswald, 1985; 1987; Schwartzman, 1984).

General system theory

KEY TERM

general system theory: systems consist of smaller elements or subsystems but, in turn, are also part of larger supra-systems

Von Bertalanffy's (1950; 1974) **general system theory**, which he put forward towards the middle of the twentieth century, played a particularly important role in psychology in the movement away from a reductionist towards a *holistic view*. According to general system theory, systems consist of smaller elements or subsystems but, in turn, are also part of larger supra-systems.

These notions are clearly evident in the ecosystemic approach and imply, for example, that the individual constitutes a subsystem of the larger family system, and that the family is itself part of the supra-system of the community. Systems therefore form a hierarchy of related systems, and human functioning is studied in terms of the interactional patterns within and between systems (Fourie, 1991). (We explain the nature of systems in more detail in the sections on 'structure' and 'dynamics'.)

Self-evaluation question

- Explain how the ecosystemic approach moves away from Newtonian thinking.

Cybernetics

What does 'cybernetics' mean and what is the difference between first-order and second-order cybernetics?

The term *cybernetics* derives from the Greek word *kubernétés* which is related to the word 'steersman' or 'governor'. The term was coined by the mathematician Norbert Wiener in 1948 to refer to the principles that regulate the dissemination of information or messages (Wiener cited in Buckley, 1968).

Cybernetics has to do with the basic principles underlying the control, regulation, exchange and processing of information. The assumption is that the same basic principles are involved whether we are concerned with machinery, organisms or social structures (Simon, Stierlin & Wynne, 1985). Gregory Bateson (1972) was particularly influential in emphasising the importance of cybernetics in the field of human relationships. Bateson (1972; 1979) laid great emphasis on the idea that the interactions between the parts of a whole do not imply one-way connections and that there are, in fact, two-way recursive feedback loops. Bateson (1972:244) maintains that:

... if you want to understand some phenomenon or appearance, you must consider that phenomenon within the context of all completed circuits which are relevant to it.

Interesting facts about the life and ideas of Gregory Bateson can be found on the following websites:

<http://www.interculturalstudies.org/Bateson/biography.html>

<http://www.interculturalstudies.org/Bateson/>

The influence of cybernetics is clearly apparent in the ecosystemic approach because it stresses relations and connections, and highlights the study of interactional, recursive *patterns* between and within systems. So, for example, when an ecosystemic thinker studies the patterns in a marital relationship, the focus is not simply on the ideas the man and the woman have of one another, but also on what each believes the other thinks of him or her and on the interactional patterns with other family members and with people in the wider family and community contexts.

KEY TERMS

first-order cybernetics:

the objective observation of patterns from outside the observed system

second-order cybernetics:

contends that observations are not objective, but are coloured by the observer's behaviour and how he or she observes

This first form of cybernetics is known as **first-order cybernetics**. Although first-order cybernetics emphasises the observation of patterns, and different ways in which events, experiences or phenomena are organised, the assumption is that the observer can take up a position outside the observed system and describe the interactions objectively. Thus Von Foerster (Johnson, 1993) refers to first-order cybernetics as 'the cybernetics of observed systems'.

Second-order and third-order cybernetics

Second-order cybernetics proposes a higher-order cybernetics whereby the observer becomes part of the system. The proponents of second-order cybernetics (Hoffman, 1985) point out that these observations are not objective, but are coloured by the observer's behaviour and how he or she observes.

The recursive connections between systems thus include the connection between the observer and the observed system (Atkinson & Heath, 1990). As Von Foerster (Keeney, 1982:163) puts it:

... cybernetics of cybernetics is therefore a move from the cybernetics of observed systems to that of observing systems.

Third-order cybernetics applies to *semiotic systems* (Krieger cited in Artus, 2003). Semiotic systems are directed at making something meaningful by giving it a name, designation or a signification. Semiotic systems therefore refer to *meaning systems*.

A meaning system could consider itself, for example, to be ‘physical’ or ‘spiritual’ or refer to itself as ‘I’. Meaning is, however, neither a thing, nor a specific kind of organism (for example, a nervous system), but it is a level of emergent order wherein all things are designated and, in this way, become meaningful (Krieger cited in Artus, 2003: 89).

Philip Baron (2014) dedicated the following web-page to students studying cybernetics:

<http://www.ecosystemic-psychology.org.za/home/ethical-psychology/overcoming-obstacles-in-learning-cybernetic-psychology>

Self-evaluation question

- How does first-order cybernetics differ from second-order cybernetics?

Constructivism

What is the difference between ‘constructivism’ and ‘social constructionism’?

KEY TERM

constructivism: people create their ‘realities’ through the meanings they link to what they observe

Some researchers use **constructivism** as an umbrella term to refer to both *constructivism* and *social constructionism*. However, due to certain underlying differences and the prominence which social constructionism is presently receiving, it is deemed necessary to differentiate between the two terms (Rapmund, 2000).

According to constructivism, people create their ‘realities’ through the meanings they link to what they observe (Efran & Lukens, 1985; Efran, Lukens & Lukens, 1988). What they observe does not, therefore, have an independent, objective meaning, but takes on the meaning that the observer attributes to it.

The Chilean biologist, Humberto Maturana (Crosby, 1991), used the visual abilities of frogs as an analogy to explain the process that underlies constructivist thinking. When we see a frog catch a fly, we assume that the fly looks much the same to the frog as it does to us. In fact, however, the frog’s eyes allow it to perceive the fly only when it moves, and then just as a vague moving shape. The frog thus has access to the reality of the world only as it is filtered by its sensory apparatus. In the same way, we construct our own reality by means of the eyes with which we

see it, and it is a filtered reality. This is why Maturana says that five members of a family do not have five different views of the same family, but that five different families are actually created, based on the five members' completely different sets of meanings. Maturana's thinking is referred to as *radical constructivism*.

From a constructivist point of view, there can be no question of one correct, objective truth or reality, and 'reality' is created by the observer, who acts in accordance with his or her 'reality' and looks for corroboration of that 'reality'. There need not necessarily be consensus about the 'realities' that develop among the members of a system. When there is consensus about an observation, Maturana maintains, this occurs because a *consensual domain* in language has come into being among the observers, and not because the phenomenon about which they have agreed has an intrinsic existence independent of its observation (Fourie, 1994:28). The following example illustrates the development of a consensual domain within a system.

Example

When Jane and Claud, her fiancé, come to spend a weekend with her parents, Jane carries her own suitcase into the house. Her mother sees this and decides immediately that her future son-in-law is lazy. She discusses her concern about Claud's laziness with her husband and with Jane's younger sister, and they decide they will all observe him carefully.

That afternoon an international rugby game is broadcast on television, but Jane's father decides that the lawn simply has to be mowed. When Claud spends the afternoon glued to the television set instead of helping Jane's father, the family's suspicions are confirmed and they all agree that Jane is planning to marry a lazy, self-indulgent lout.

When discussing the dynamics and development of the personality, we will point out that Maturana (Johnson, 1993) places great emphasis on the structural determinism of systems, and that he explains the existence of a consensual domain as a *structural coupling* or a linking of structures (see 15.5.1). Structural coupling is a complex topic that we do not discuss in detail here. (If you are interested in finding out more about it, you could consult the work of Maturana and Varela (1980)).

A radical constructivist like Maturana, who does not acknowledge the two-way or recursive nature of the interaction between the observer and the observed, runs the risk of being described as *solipsistic*. A solipsist believes that reality actually exists only in the mind of the observer, and the observation is not influenced by feedback from what is observed. There is a danger here that any observation can be regarded as acceptable. Von Glaserfeld and Watzlawick (Held, 1990) point out, however, that constructivist thinking that is informed by second-order cybernetics assumes that the observer is part of the system's recursive feedback loop, and that this does not, therefore, imply the kind of solipsistic approach that holds to a philosophy of 'anything goes'. Fourie (1991:8) elaborates on this as follows:

The reality which is co-constructed in a system cannot be just anything, it has to fit with the ideas which the participants have about themselves, about each other, about the problem and about the world in general.

In addition, it is accepted that, while all ‘realities’ are regarded as *valid*, one ‘reality’ may well be more *useful* than another for a given system (Fourie, 1994:34). A family may, for example, reach consensus that they are caught up in a situation where they are powerless. For them, this is a valid ‘reality’ – but it is not necessarily a useful one. One can help a family such as this to explore other ‘realities’, and then to co-construct a new, more useful ‘reality’ in terms of which they can start doing something about their situation.

In summary, then, although general system theory broke away from reductionism, it still implied an objective observer who remained outside of the system. It also implicitly accepted linear causality, in that the observer was endowed with a position of authority from which he or she could influence the system from outside. With its rejection of objectivity in favour of constructivism, and its emphasis on the autonomy of the system, the ecosystemic approach represents a further step in the shift away from the Newtonian scientific epistemology (Fourie, 1991).

Social constructionism

KEY TERM

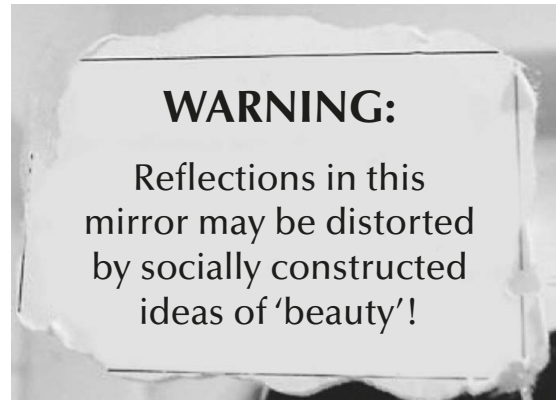
social constructionism:
the way we make sense of our world is informed by our interaction with social and cultural contexts

Social constructionism expands constructivist thinking by including the important role that social and cultural contexts play in the way we interpret the world or create meaning. According to this view, the way we make sense of our world, our ideas and attitudes, are informed by our interaction with the particular social and cultural context we exist in (Dean & Rhodes, 1998). Although social constructionism therefore accepts that we create our own realities, it acknowledges that people from similar social and/or cultural contexts, ‘socially construct reality by [their] use of shared and agreed meanings communicated via language; that is that [their] beliefs about the world are social inventions’ (Berger & Luckman cited in Rapmund, 2000:106). These social inventions or meanings that develop over time within social communities can make it easier for people who share such realities to understand each other. In contrast, those who come from different social and cultural contexts may find it difficult to understand each other’s perceptions of the world. Therefore, the role of social constructions should be recognised in multicultural encounters (Gergen, 1999; 2009). It becomes important to listen to the ‘life stories’ that people tell, as these stories are informed by their interaction with a particular social and cultural context (Kiguwa, 2014; Rapmund, 2000). The encounters Bradford Keeney had with indigenous people such as the Bushmen in Southern Africa and the Guarnani Indians in South America serve as prime examples of such story-telling.

It should also be borne in mind that people tend to adhere to these socially constructed belief systems, despite the fact that their personal realities may not fit the socially constructed reality. This may have negative consequences for the functioning of the person, especially where the person feels that he or she is not living up to social expectations.

Example

Many women share the belief that to be beautiful is to be thin and that 'weight-watching' should be the norm. This belief is not an objective truth, but is socially constructed and has become the 'truth' for many. The negative consequences can, for example, be seen in those who have developed eating disorders as a result of this belief.



Enrichment

In an article: *Personal construct psychology, radical constructivism and social constructionism: A dialogue*, Efran, McNamee, Warren and Raskin (2014) focus on the points of contact and the differences between the three perspectives and make suggestions as to how theorists from these three perspectives might best 'go on' together.

Activity

Choose a topic such as 'fashion trends' or 'favourite cars'. Discuss this topic in a group of friends from a similar cultural background. Then discuss the same topic in a multicultural group. Did the participants' social contexts influence their views? Write down your conclusions.

Self-evaluation question

- Explain the concepts 'constructivism' and 'consensual domain'.
- Explain why 'social constructionism' is regarded as an expansion of 'constructivism'.

15.3 The view of the person underlying the approach

How is the nature of the person viewed from an ecosystemic perspective?

It is important to note that the ecosystemic approach assumes that any attempt to put forward a *view of the person* will be regarded as just one possible construction of 'reality'. What follows is therefore the writer's own view, which is obviously informed by her social and cultural context, and does not reflect a fixed reality. This view is, of course, also based on the writer's dialogue with the ideas of others. There is a further assumption, too, which is that you, the reader, will enter into a dialogue with the ideas that are presented here, and that new ideas will be co-constructed in this process (Baron, 2014; Boer & Moore, 1994; Fourie, 1994).

According to the ecosystemic approach, a human being is seen as a *subsystem within a hierarchy of larger systems*, such as the family and the community. The individual does, however, occupy the central position within the system and he or she is made up, in turn, of certain subsystems. Some of the subsystems that have been identified include physiological, intrapersonal, verbal, non-verbal (Jasnoski, 1984), bodily, cognitive and spiritual dimensions (Hancock, 1985). There is no explicit reference to levels of consciousness, but there is no apparent reason why unconscious processes should not have a place as a subsystem of human functioning.

The idea that a person *assigns meaning to everything he or she comes into contact with*, and that this meaning represents ‘reality’ for that person, holds an important place in the ecosystemic approach. This ‘reality’ is valid for the person concerned, although someone else might construe that ‘reality’ differently. The approach therefore recognises different ‘realities’ which exist side by side. But it is also possible that people can construct a ‘reality’ together, about which they agree or reach consensus. So, for example, we agree that a framed piece of glass is called a ‘window’. Yet some people find ‘shop windows’ endlessly entertaining, while others hurry past them.

The ecosystemic approach also recognises the important role played by the *language a person uses when assigning meaning*. In fact, meaning exists solely in verbal or non-verbal language, which the person reveals to himself or herself through internal dialogue, or to others through external dialogue (Efran & Lukens, 1985; Fourie, 1994). A father, for example, does not understand why his son cries at night until the son points a shaking finger at a gown hanging on a hook, and whispers something about a ‘witch’.

Bear in mind, as well, that the ecosystemic approach has a *constructivist epistemology*, leading to a marked emphasis on the idea that *the meaning a person attaches to a topic or an experience is determined by the person, and not by the topic or experience* (Dell, 1985). In our example of the little boy who mistakes a gown hanging on a hook for a witch, this is a ‘reality’ that frightens him, and that he has created himself. His self-created ‘reality’ thus directs his behaviour.

According to the ecosystemic approach, *the network of meanings* is the manner in which an individual looks at the world. It reflects his or her needs, wishes, goals, values and priorities; but it also represents the needs, wishes, values, ideas and beliefs of the larger systems of which the person is a part, and the interactional patterns between these systems. Human growth and development are therefore also seen in terms of the changes that take place in the patterns of meaning of systems.

A further important point is that human systems are regarded as *autonomous* because their meaning structures determine their own actions. Although a system can, of course, be *perturbed* (disturbed) by a second system, the second system can influence it only in a manner that the first permits (see 15.5.3).

Example

A girl who believes that she gains status among her friends by being slim clings to this 'reality', and only eats now and again even though she is as thin as a rake. She retains her autonomy in the sense that her behaviour is in line with her 'reality', and she does not give in to her mother's urging to eat regular meals. The girl's behaviour can only change if she can enter into a dialogue with another person or other people, and construct (co-construct) new 'realities'. She will only do this in a way that her meaning structure allows her to do at any given time.

In families, these 'realities' can survive in a particular family context for generations in the form of beliefs or myths. The women in the family may, for example, believe that they will receive love only if they are weak and sickly. Or there may be a myth that young girls are molested during puberty. The functioning of family members is then shaped around these myths.

In a therapeutic context, the therapist's role is to question these myths so that the family can explore new, alternative realities and construct another reality that fits in with the system (Cecchin, 1987).

We can summarise by saying that the ecosystemic approach presents a picture of a human who:

- functions as a subsystem in a context of a larger system
- assigns meaning to experience through language, thereby creating a 'reality' that is valid for him or her
- acts autonomously in accordance with this meaning structure, and functions as part of a network of changing, interactional patterns of meanings.

Self-evaluation question

- Which view of the person, in your opinion, underlies the ecosystemic approach?

15.4 The structure of the personality

Which kinds of structure are recognised within the ecosystemic approach?

In this section, we give attention not only to the kinds of structure that the ecosystemic approach deals with, but also to how the observer gives structure to information. We therefore look at *human ecosystems* and the process of *punctuation*.

15.4.1 Human ecosystems

We have already pointed out that, as a result of the influence of general system theory, psychology no longer focused only on the smaller elements of behaviour, but came to regard human functioning in terms of larger wholes or systems. In addition the impact of interdependent systems upon another was also highlighted.

The individual is therefore regarded as a subsystem within larger systems and having subsystems of its own which all interact. The following example illustrates the idea of such a human ecosystem.

Sandile is an individual, but he is also part of a larger family system consisting of a father, mother and three siblings as well as grandparents and several other uncles, aunts and cousins. He lives on a farm and is therefore also part of the larger farming community. He attends a nearby school and travels to school with his friends on a bus. The larger school system will therefore also impact on his functioning. He is a Zulu boy and therefore part of the Zulu culture which will also influence his behaviour.

Internal subsystems within Sandile which will interact are, for example, physiological systems such as his brain functions, cardiac system, lymphatic systems, neuro systems as well as language functions (verbal and non-verbal), emotions and his senses like his hearing and eyesight.

Figure 15.1 is a diagrammatical illustration of Sandile's human ecosystem.

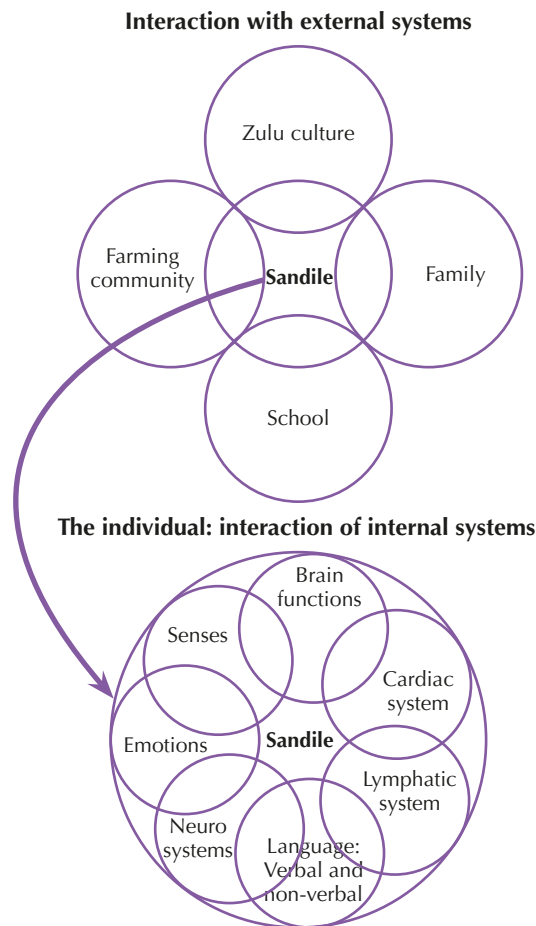


Figure 15.1 The human ecosystem
Source: Moore (2016)

From this example it is clear that although the individual is central in the human ecosystem it is essential to take the context into consideration when examining human behaviour.

A further point to note is that systems are regarded as *synergistic*. This means that the whole is always more than the sum of its parts. Information about separate parts of a system cannot therefore simply be added together in order to say something about the whole. Indeed, the focus is on interactions within and between systems, and on the patterns of the interactions (Jasnoski cited in O'Connor & Lubin, 1984).

It is assumed that all levels in the human ecosystem interact with one another, and that the boundaries between systems are semi-permeable, allowing information to flow across the boundaries between systems and making it possible for systems to influence one another. When a given level of functioning, such as the family, is examined, it is therefore necessary not to lose sight of the larger whole and the complexity of interactional patterns between systems. The observer can, metaphorically speaking, use a pair of binoculars to focus on either the near or the far distance, but it is essential to remain aware that the whole is far more than just the sum total of the different levels of functioning.

The individual is also represented in terms of subsystems and from our example it is clear that the interaction between the individual's physiological, emotional and verbal and non-verbal behaviour should be considered, together with his or her interactions with larger systems such as the family and community. But it is not just the interaction between systems that are important: the patterns that these interactions create are just as important. The interactions between the members of a family, for example can clearly reveal that Lerato plays the role of the family 'peace keeper'.

15.4.2 Punctuation

According to Bateson (Keeney, 1982), what we know and can know are based on the distinctions we make. The differences we perceive make the difference and determine the kinds of relationships or patterns we see.

KEY TERM

punctuation: the activity whereby events or experiences are organised in a particular way

Bateson (Keeney, 1982) uses the term **punctuation** to refer to the activity whereby events or experiences are organised in a particular way. When we look at the sea, but focus on a single wave that glimmers in the moonlight, the wave is the punctuation, or *nodal point*, within the massive whole of endlessly moving water (Keeney, 1984:35).

Example

Someone walks into a room and comments on the tastefully arranged flowers on the table. For this person, the flower arrangement is in the foreground, while all the other contents of the room are in the background. Someone else who walks into the same room might remark on the lovely blend of colours in the room. The two people organise the information in the room in different ways.

The term ‘punctuation’ is strongly reminiscent of ‘the construing of events’ of which Kelly talks. Remember, however, that Bateson places great emphasis on cybernetics, and that the particular way in which *interactional patterns* are punctuated is therefore of key importance in the ecosystemic approach.

At the same time, the notion of different possible punctuations underlines the existence of different realities. In the ecosystemic approach, especially from within a constructivist framework, it is important to acknowledge what is known as a ‘both/and’ position where realities exist side by side, and one reality is not regarded as more valid than another (Auerswald, 1985; Keeney, 1983a; Tomm, 1988).

Self-evaluation question

- What is meant by the concept ‘punctuation’?

15.5 The dynamics and development of the personality

How does the personality develop and function according to the ecosystemic approach?

The dynamics and development of the personality (or rather the *dynamics and development of systems*) are closely linked in the ecosystemic approach. Accordingly, we discuss them together and give attention to a few concepts that relate to both dynamics and development.

15.5.1 The structural determination of systems

Maturana (Efran & Lukens, 1985) places particular emphasis on the *self-determinism* of systems. According to this line of reasoning, systems are not directly influenced by independent, external agents. The functioning of the system is determined by the *organisation* and *structure* of the system itself. Maturana (Fourie, 1994; Johnson, 1993) distinguishes between the organisation and the structure of a system. *Organisation* is what defines the system as a unified entity. In the case of a washing machine, for example, its organisation would be the particular way in which its components are put together and which defines it as a washing machine. The organisation therefore determines that it is an appliance that is to be used for washing clothes and not, for example, for cooking food.

A system is described as *organisationally closed*, because a system cannot continue to exist if its organisation is relinquished. In other words, a washing machine can continue to exist only as a washing machine and not as anything else. The particular composition and configuration of its components are known as the *structure*, and this may differ from one washing machine to another.

Thus, although a twin-tub washing machine and an automatic washing machine are both washing machines (they have the same organisation), their structure is

different and so is the washing process used in each. The structure of a system therefore determines how it can be used, and we cannot, through our actions, influence a twin-tub to function like an automatic washing machine. Because systems cannot be directly influenced from outside, they are regarded as *informationally closed*, and because structure determines their specific actions, they are regarded as *structurally determined*.

In living organisms, organisation remains essentially unchanged, while the structure of the system changes constantly. In a family, for example, structural changes take place all the time. Children leave the home one by one, but the family continues to exist as an organisation. Dramatic structural changes, such as only one member of a family surviving a car accident, can change the organisation of the system, however, and the system then ceases to exist as a family. Because structural changes are always taking place, it is important to note that, at a given moment, the structure of a system determines the actions of the system, and its reactions to ‘perturbations’ from outside.

KEY TERM

perturbation: is associated with the disturbance or agitation of the interaction patterns within and between systems

The term **perturbation** is used to refer to the fluctuations in a system. This term derives from the Latin word *perturbare*, which is made up of *per*, meaning ‘thoroughly’, and *turbare*, meaning ‘disturb’. For example, the therapist who suggests an alternative reality to the reality construed by the family, could be introducing a perturbation or disturbance in the family system (also see 15.5.3).

15.5.2 The autonomy of systems

Because the actions of a system are determined by its structure, systems are *autonomous*, or self-regulating. If a system loses its autonomy and can no longer determine its own actions, it is no longer able to operate as a system. Accordingly, *systems strive to retain their autonomy*. A system may even cling to patterns that an observer might regard as a symptom of dysfunction in a desperate attempt to retain its autonomy (Fourie, 1991). This means that any changes in the system are determined by its structure, and that no system can be directly, or linearly, influenced by another system.

Although a system may be perturbed by another system, the reaction to the perturbation is determined by the system itself. On this basis, it is accepted that human systems are *relatively open* in that they do enter into interaction with other systems, but the influences of others are dealt with in an autonomous, unique way (Tjersland, 1990).

In a therapeutic situation, therapeutic inputs are sometimes seen as perturbations. When the autonomous nature of systems is acknowledged, the implication is that therapeutic inputs should be seen as no more than alternative information that can trigger perturbations in a system, but that will be accommodated or rejected within the system in an autonomous, unique way (Deissler, 1988; Hoffman, 1985; 1990).

An equally important point is that a system, in its attempts to retain its autonomy, can do only what its structure allows it to do at a given moment. A given family system will, therefore, react to a divorce, for example, in the way that its structure allows it to do at a given time.

15.5.3 Interactions within and between systems: Stability and change

The cybernetic principles on which ecosystemic thinking is based propose that the interactions within and between systems should be seen in terms of *patterns that connect* (Bateson, 1972; 1979), and that interaction takes place through circular *feedback loops*. Information about the system is thus fed back to the system through interaction with other systems or subsystems.

The circular nature of these feedback loops is clearly evident in the idea that information about the system comes back into the system. These feedback loops are apparent in the form of *positive* and *negative feedback*. When feedback gives rise to changes in the system, it is known as positive feedback. When feedback brings about no change, it is known as negative feedback. Negative and positive feedback are therefore associated with stability and change in the system. Negative feedback stabilises the system by minimising any perturbations and keeping the system as stable or unchanged as possible, while positive feedback sets in motion changes in the system. Positive and negative feedback work in a complementary way to protect the integrity of the system, while allowing a certain amount of flexibility (Jasnosi cited in O'Connor & Lubin, 1984).

The arrival of a new baby is an example of positive feedback in a family system, bringing about changes in, and reorganisation of, family patterns. At the same time, however, the parents assure one another that they still want to spend time together the way they did before (negative feedback), and this ensures that some of the old family patterns are retained.

The processes of stabilisation and growth cause a dynamic movement in the system, but the two processes balance one another in such a way that a *dynamic equilibrium* or *balance* is maintained in the system. This suggests that a *homeostatic principle*, deriving from general system theory, is being brought into play here. According to such a principle, the energy within the system is distributed among the parts of the system in such a way that a condition of equilibrium is reached.

In addition to the principle of homeostasis, general system theory also rests on the principles of *equifinality* and *equipotentiality*. In the case of equifinality, the final position or result is the same or equivalent, although the initial position may be different. In the case of equipotentiality, the original position or potential is the same, while different final conditions or effects may be obtained (Simon, Stierlin & Wynne, 1985).

The principles of *equifinality* and *equipotentiality* imply a dynamic process in which different ‘paths’ can lead to similar destinations, and similar starting points can culminate in entirely different final conditions. With these principles in mind, the ecosystemic approach accepts that different paths may be followed in the process of change, and that a condition of balance can be reached through self-regulating, homeostatic functions.

Some writers, however, such as Hoffman, Dell and Goolishian (Schwartzman, 1984), maintain that drastic transformations involving basic assumptions and the restructuring of the system need to be explained by something more than homeostatic principles. They believe that fluctuations in the system can move beyond the limits of self-regulating processes, and that the system itself then reorganises in an unpredictable way on a higher level of complexity. The perturbation in the system is therefore so great that balance cannot be restored through a simple redistribution of energy within the system.

The disorder in the system necessitates a kind of ‘evolutionary’ leap to a higher level at which the system can reorganise itself according to more complex patterns. In such a process, where drastic transformations take place, it is accepted that the boundaries of the system are relatively open, and that influences from within and outside the system affect its existing functioning in an unpredictable way.

In the case of a divorce where the father leaves the family, the family system experiences a powerful perturbation. Following this, the way in which the mother and children interact – which is an integration of emotional, cognitive and behavioural elements – may present an entirely new equilibrium. Different families do, of course, reach this kind of new equilibrium in different ways, and precisely how they form new interactional family patterns is unpredictable.

In the example we have just given, the divorce causes perturbations in the family’s interactional patterns. Consider, too, the perturbations that are caused when someone incurs brain damage in an accident, and the adaptations that have to be made by the person concerned and other members of his or her family. In the therapeutic context, the notion of perturbation is sometimes attached to the therapist’s inputs, which perturb the system in an attempt to bring about change, but always with due consideration for the autonomy of the system (Tjersland, 1990).

Self-evaluation questions

- What are the implications for the therapeutic process if the autonomy of the system is threatened?
- What is the difference between positive feedback and negative feedback in the ecosystemic approach?

15.6 Optimal functioning

How is ideal functioning described within the ecosystemic perspective?

In terms of the ecosystemic perspective, ideal or optimal functioning is seen as a relationship between the individual and a system in which the functioning of both is maximised. The emphasis is therefore on the optimisation of the system as a whole, and not on maximising one part of the system at the expense of another.

The actualisation of the individual and the importance of needs and goals are acknowledged, but these are not pursued at the expense of the environment or of others. However, other systems, such as the family and the physical and social environment, bear the responsibility of providing the context and the resources to enable the individual to satisfy his or her needs (Jasnoski, 1984). As in any ecosystem, the individual does, of course, form part of the systems of other individuals, and has his or her own responsibility regarding the fulfilment of their needs.

The so-called congruent state of optimal functioning implies, therefore, a dynamic, complex equilibrium or integration, where one entity, or relationship, or pattern of relationships is not maximised to the detriment of another part of the system, or relationship, or pattern of relationships. The equilibrium is of a dynamic nature, and never reaches a condition of completion. A healthy individual is characterised by complex sets of diverse behaviours and emotions that function in a dynamic equilibrium. He or she can experience joy, but also pain, and has a wide repertoire of possible behaviours (Keeney cited in O'Connor & Lubin, 1984).

Healthy development also implies a balance between stability and change. A healthy system is relatively open to different experiences that will involve transformation to a higher level of complexity, but it also retains enough 'sameness' to protect the stability of the system.

Example

The optimally functioning person who is confronted with the prospect of retiring from his or her work will make the necessary adjustments to continue leading a meaningful life without upsetting other members of the family and disrupting the family structure.

15.7 Views on psychopathology

How is non-ideal functioning described within the ecosystemic perspective?

Pathology is present in a system that reveals a *lack of balance and/or complexity*. Whereas healthy systems incline towards openness, unhealthy systems are relatively closed. Such systems do not allow much information from outside to penetrate,

and are caught up in a *pattern of unhealthy, repetitive feedback loops*. For example, in families where there is sexual molestation, the boundaries between the family and the social environment are relatively closed, so that the family functions in isolation. By contrast, the subsystems within such a family tend to be so open that the boundaries between individuals become diffused (Fasser, 1989). The family does not actually construct the problem, but is itself constructed or ordered in a particular way by the problem (Sluzki, 1983).

While there is a balance between stability and change in a healthy system, there is little change in an unhealthy system because of its relative ‘closedness’, and the system clings to either the status quo or to ‘sameness’. Accordingly, *symptoms represent escalated (or maximised) sameness*. The emotion or the behaviour stays the same, but there is a change in how intense or extreme it is. The assumption is that the entire system is involved in the process of balancing, and that the escalation of an emotion or of a behaviour on the part of one individual can lead to an escalation in the opposite emotion or behaviour in other members of the system. Thus, if one person becomes depressed or irresponsible, another member of the system becomes lively or extremely responsible (Keeney cited in O’Connor & Lubin, 1984).

Symptoms are regarded as metaphors for the relationships in the family. A symptom says something about the dynamics of the system – it tells the story of the repetitive feedback loops in which the system is trapped. Sexual molestation therefore tells the story of relationship networks.

In the next section, we pay attention to the interventions that a therapist can make when dealing with unhealthy systems.

Self-evaluation question

- Explain how healthy and unhealthy systems operate according to the ecosystemic perspective.

15.8 Implications and applications

What are the implications of the ecosystemic approach for human functioning in different contexts?

The *ecosystemic approach* represents a ‘set’ of principles according to which any facet of human functioning can be observed and described, and it therefore has implications for all aspects of human functioning, and can be applied in different contexts. We discuss, in particular, the implications and applications in the therapeutic context, although we also refer briefly to the implications for education, research, and the interpretation and handling of aggression.

15.8.1 Psychotherapy

Because the ecosystemic approach was applied in psychology in the context of family therapy, it follows that this approach has many implications for psychotherapy. Initially, the principles reflected in therapeutic orientations were those of general system theory, ecology and constructivism, which are linked with first-order cybernetics. Later orientations also include certain basic principles of general system theory and ecology, but incorporate the ideas underlying second-order cybernetics and constructivist notions related to second-order cybernetics.

Structural and strategic therapy are examples of the earlier therapeutic orientations, in which the therapist acted from a position of power from outside the system. The developments in therapy introduced by the Milan group represent a transition between the earlier and later orientations. In their work, the therapist was, at first, positioned outside the system, but they gave increasing recognition to second-order cybernetics and constructivist ideas, and accordingly came to see the therapist as part of the system.

In later, more modern ecosystemic therapy, system theory, ecology, second-order cybernetics and the constructivist ideas underlying all of these are of central importance, and the therapist's role is therefore defined as that of a 'participant facilitator' (Real, 1990).

Nonetheless, some of the earlier ideas are still accommodated within the later, more modern ecosystemic framework and it is therefore essential to take note of the therapeutic implications inherent in the entire developmental span of this approach.

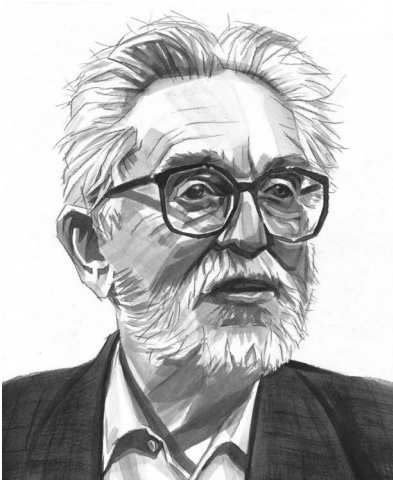
Earlier therapeutic orientations

With the prominence of general system theory and cybernetics, there was a shift away from the study of parts to the study of larger wholes in the therapeutic field, and an emphasis on patterns and organisation within and between systems. Therapeutic attention therefore focused on the family as a system, rather than on the individual. However, implicit in general system theory and first-order cybernetics was the idea of an objective observer, who could influence the system from outside.

In the therapeutic context, this created the notion that the therapist could remain outside the family and act from a position of power. To illustrate this early orientation, we will discuss briefly the *structural and strategic orientations*.

(a) The structural orientation

During the sixties and seventies (of the twentieth century), general system theory stimulated an awareness of the prominent role of hierarchical organisation within the family system, and within larger systems such as the work context. One view which developed was that if the boundaries of defined hierarchies within a system were destroyed, this would have a detrimental effect on the system. This gave rise to what became known as *structural family therapy*, with Salvador Minuchin (1974) as its founder.



Salvador Minuchin
Source: Gallo Images. Getty Images

Therapists of the structural school believe that problems in families arise when there is a lack of clarity about the *boundaries* that define structures in the family, and when *coalitions* and *alliances*, formed over generations, impair the hierarchies within the family system. A coalition between a child and one parent against the other parent, for example, may impair the natural generational hierarchy. Families with diffuse boundaries are described as *enmeshed*, while those with rigid boundaries are termed *disengaged* (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981).

A basic therapeutic assumption is that a healthy family system displays a structure that has flexible or adjustable boundaries between the parent subsystem, the child subsystem and the outside world, and in which the hierarchy is not disturbed (Israelstam, 1988). The boundaries between systems should therefore be permeable, but neither too loose nor too rigid (Sluzki, 1983).

The website below provides a link to a video in which Jay Lappin conducts a heart-warming interview with Salvador Minuchin, the founder of Structural Family Therapy.

www.psychotherapy.net/video/minuchin-family-therapy?go

A structural therapist is expected to transcend technique and to give precedence to his or her role as ‘healer of people in pain’ (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). Yet the part played by the therapist in restructuring family systems is somewhat dramatic. Structural therapists may, for example, consciously break up coalitions and build up alliances between members of a family. In *The Craft of Family Therapy: Challenging Certainties*, Minuchin, Reiter and Borda (2013), help trainees to move from an individualistic view to one of seeing interactions and systems.

(b) The strategic orientation

The names that are most likely to be mentioned in any discussion of strategic family therapy are those of Haley, Watzlawick, Madanes, Beavin, Jackson, Weakland and Fisch (Haley, 1981; Madanes, 1981; Watzlawick, 1976; Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967; Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974). Strategic family therapists concentrate mainly on the family as a system, but will often also include members of the wider family and larger social systems, such as the school and the hospital (Madanes, 1981).

Like structural therapists, they are sensitive to the hierarchical organisation of families and to coalitions and alliances, and they define problems in terms of communication patterns (Haley, 1981). From this it is clear that they emphasise the cybernetic idea of *interactional patterns* that connect different parts of the system. *Control* is an important theme in strategic therapy. The therapist functions from a position of power outside the family, and it is his or her responsibility to plan *strategies* around the problem in order to solve it (Israelstam, 1988). This acknowledges the idea of open systems, in terms of which the therapist can influence the family from outside, but taking into account the autonomy of the system – in other words, its ability to determine its own actions.

Strategic therapists seldom use psychiatric and psychological diagnostic labels. They accept that the symptom is an analogy for the problem, or a metaphorical representation of it. Therapy is directed at changing these analogies or metaphors by

creating alternative metaphors. The therapist therefore invents alternative realities and offers or prescribes these to the family, couple or partners. A team approach is usually adopted in strategic therapy. One therapist conducts the session, while the rest of the team observes the therapeutic processes from behind a one-way mirror. The therapist who is engaged in the session then consults the team, both during and between sessions, and they plan the strategies together. The following example provides an illustration of this kind of intervention.

Example

A married couple consulted Madanes (1981) in order to address the wife's bulimic behaviour. The therapist's exploration of the interactional patterns within the system led her to conclude that the symptom was a metaphor for the wife's rebellious feelings towards her domineering husband. The therapist regarded the bulimic behaviour as the wife's way of expressing her distress about the hierarchical organisation within the system. By behaving in this way, the wife managed to make the husband 'powerless', and to waste his money at the same time.

Madanes prescribed a different 'metaphor' that would play out the same dynamic. She asked the wife to throw away, every day, \$5 worth of food bought by the husband. This allowed the waste of food, which forms part of the bulimic pattern, to be represented metaphorically, and the rebellion against the husband's domineering behaviour, in this particular case, was also built into the metaphor.

The transition from early to later orientations: The Milan group

During the seventies, the work of the Milan group in Italy attracted a great deal of attention. This group consisted of four psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, namely Drs. Mara Selvini-Palazzoli, Luigi Boscolo, Gianfranco Cecchin and Giuliana Prata. The Milan group moved away from a psychoanalytic framework to follow the *Palo Alto model* of the Mental Research Institute (MRI). This model was used as a basis for researching the communication patterns of schizophrenic family members.

The Milan group was influenced particularly by the work of Haley (1963), Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967), and Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974) (Tomm, 1984). Its development followed an independent line, but in 1980 it broke up because its two female members, Selvini-Palazzoli and Prata, started concentrating on research into the 'invariant prescription' – an unvarying intervention applied to all families with anorexic or schizophrenic members (Simon, 1988). The two men, Boscolo and Cecchin, continued with their teaching work, favouring an emphasis on the presentation of a number of possible interventions. In 1982, Selvini-Palazzoli ended her partnership with Prata, and she then worked with a younger group of therapists, one of whom is her son. She passed away on 21 June 1999.

Originally the Milan group focused, in their therapy, on identifying homeostatic, repetitive interactional patterns within the family system which, they felt, maintained the 'pathology'. In their research with families with schizophrenic members, they gave particular attention to the notion of a 'double bind', which highlights the role of conflicting messages in the development of schizophrenic patterns.

A double bind exists when someone is exposed to conflicting messages. A person may, for example, receive a message to take his or her own spontaneous decisions, but simultaneously receives another message that his or her decisions should be in line with the wishes of others. He or she is then trapped in a 'no win' situation! When confronted with this kind of paradox, the Milan group would prescribe an intervention which they called a *counter paradox*, aimed at freeing the family so that it could change.

This intervention consisted of attaching a positive connotation to the behaviour and requesting the family not to change it (the behaviour) – with the hope, of course, that this was precisely what the family would do. The thinking behind the counter paradox as an intervention is discussed in their well-known book, *Paradox and counter paradox* (Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1978).

By 1975, however, the group's views had been strongly influenced by Bateson's (1972) ideas about information. In particular, Bateson emphasised that ideas are created and changed by observing contrasts or differences. The distinction between 'land' and 'sea', for example, is based on the contrast between the two entities. Adopting Korzybski's maxim that 'the map is not the territory or the name is not the thing named' (Bateson, 1979:122), Bateson (1979) went on to say that it is not the thing itself (the land or the sea) that is in the observer's mind, but the *coded idea* of 'land' and 'sea'.

Bateson expanded on the idea that 'the name is not the thing named', and highlighted the rules or 'laws' that connect the ideas (codings or transformations) and make it possible for the observer to see patterns.

We do not give a detailed account of Bateson's theory of logical types (Johnson, 1993), which deals with the classification of transformations on different levels of complexity. It is, however, important to note that this theory emphasises the recursive nature of interactional communication patterns, and that this is also reflected in the therapy of the Milan group. Basing themselves on Bateson's ideas (1972; 1979), the Milan group stressed the creation of new ideas through observing contrasts or differences, and started seeing systems as dynamically changing rather than homeostatic. They also accepted that a family's view of their behaviour, or the meaning they attached to it, was not the same as the patterns of behaviour themselves.

In addition, instead of focusing on patterns of behaviour, they examined the meanings ascribed to behaviour in a particular context by members of the family, and paid attention to the messages conveyed by the behaviour. Therapy no longer consisted of identifying pathological, homeostatic patterns of behaviour, but became instead a process of discovering erroneous or outdated 'maps' of meanings associated with certain realities. This process, they believed, would give access to the level of *meaning within context*, which implies a higher level than the level of action.

Interviewing methods were especially important in the Milan group, and they formulated a number of important guidelines in this respect. In the following Enrichment, we describe the three principles, namely *hypothesising*, *circular questioning* and *neutrality*, which initially served as guidelines for family therapy (Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1980).

Enrichment

Hypothesising, circular questioning and neutrality

Hypothesising implies that therapists will formulate a hypothesis about family relationships on the basis of the information available, and that this hypothesis will enable them to gather further information in a meaningful way, to test the hypothesis and to propose a new hypothesis on the basis of the additional information.

Circular questioning implies, first, that there is a reciprocal pattern of communication between therapist and system, in which the therapist asks a question and listens carefully to the feedback from the system before asking a further question.

However, circular questioning includes the posing of questions that involve the relationships between three members of the system. These are known as 'triadic questions'. With triadic questions, a third person is asked to comment on the relationship between two other people (Keeney & Ross, 1985; Penn, 1982). This makes available a wealth of information to which the therapist would otherwise have no access.

Neutrality refers to the neutrality of the therapist's position, in the sense that he or she does not choose sides or give more support to some members of the family than to others. In Milan-style therapy, therapists make no judgements and blame no one. They believe in the potential of the system to heal itself and, accordingly, take no responsibility for bringing about change (Israelstam, 1988).

After Cecchin and Boscolo had broken away from Selvini-Palazzoli and Prata, Cecchin (1987) put forward a revised version of these principles, which is representative of the direction taken in the development of later ecosystemic therapy. He linked the principles of hypothesising, circular questioning and neutrality to the notion of 'curiosity'. In so doing, Cecchin (1987) moved away from the original definition of neutrality which, according to him, gave rise to a lack of involvement and coldness on the part of some therapists (Coleman, 1987). He favoured a new emphasis on a joint quest by therapist and family, undertaken in a spirit of curiosity, for alternative patterns of functioning.

Whereas formulating a hypothesis is essentially a technique, and assumes that the therapist knows better than the family, curiosity represents a relationship in which the therapist listens attentively to the family's hypotheses, or rather, the stories the family tells about itself. The therapist thus participates in generating other stories that could also portray the family history. When circular questioning becomes linked with curiosity, the questions the therapist poses are directed at bringing existing meaning structures under the spotlight and considering other 'realities'.

It is evident that Cecchin's (1987) reformulation of the principles underlying family therapy does not assign a position of power to the therapist, but rather the role of participant facilitator within an autonomous system. This point of view accords with second-order cybernetics and constructivism, and it therefore converges with later therapeutic orientations within the ecosystemic approach.

Later orientations

Later, or more modern, ecosystemic therapy is based on the principles of second-order cybernetics and constructivism, in terms of which there continues to be a focus on interactional patterns within and between systems, on complexity and on context, but the therapist now participates actively as an observer of the interactional processes. As Maturana and Varela (cited in Tomm, 1984:124) put it:

It is this position of simultaneously being an observer of the effects of specific actions and being a participant-actor that makes change possible.

The therapist thus includes himself or herself as a co-creator and facilitator in the co-evolution of new, shared realities within the system (Deissler, 1988; Keeney & Ross, 1985).

Hoffman (1985) regards *second-order family therapy*, as it is known, as a movement away from strategic inputs and specific proposals for change. According to her, second-order therapy is an attempt to *create a context for change* rather than specifically suggesting ways of changing. It is also *an attempt to change the assumptions that underlie behaviour rather than trying to change the behaviour itself*.

Atkinson and Heath (1990) hold the view that, for therapists who subscribe to the principles of second-order cybernetics, the key point is the link between 'pragmatic strategies' and 'aesthetic wisdom'. You have already come across certain strategies in the previous section. For Atkinson and Heath (1990), applying such strategies is not sufficient: they need to be amplified by 'aesthetic wisdom'.

This aesthetic wisdom has to do with *a shift in the personal predispositions of the therapist*. This shift means, essentially, that therapists will realise that their knowledge of the interactions within and between systems will always be limited, and that they will never have a big enough picture of the whole to allow them to make accurate predictions. In addition, therapists need to be capable of assuming a *humble position* within a system, accommodating different realities that exist side by side, and respecting the ability of the system itself to bring about a healthy balance (Auerswald, 1985; Keeney, 1983a; Tomm, 1988).

This does not mean that therapists have to take a passive stance, however. On the contrary, this approach gives them the freedom to be flexible and innovative. They can make suggestions and offer certain constructions of realities, provided they do not assume that their suggestions and constructions will necessarily be accepted

by their clients. A therapist can, therefore, enter into the therapeutic process as a person, with his or her full repertoire of theoretic frameworks, talents, attributes and creativity intact (Crosby, 1991). Music, different creative art forms, metaphors and rituals can all become part of the therapeutic process (Keeney, 1990).

It is clear that this orientation acknowledges the *autonomous nature of systems* and that it is grounded upon *constructivism*. (Constructivism was explained earlier.)

With the move away from the strategic approach towards constructivism, the team approach continues to be used in some cases, but now with the aim of generating alternative perspectives through a co-evolution of ideas among team members. These alternatives are not, however, conveyed to the family, couple or individual as prescriptions, but simply as alternative realities that the system can consider.

In the later ecosystemic therapy, the theme is always the co-construction of ideas or meanings (Speed, 1991; Boer & Moore, 1994). According to Anderson and Goolishian (1990:162) the therapist and the client each has his or her own theoretic framework. When they enter into dialogue, they develop a new shared framework of meaning that is generated through their interaction with one another.

In addition, ‘social constructionism’, emphasises the possibility that people can deny their own personal stories or narratives in favour of so-called ‘grand narratives’ that reflect the shared beliefs of a particular social or cultural context. The therapist is therefore challenged to also listen to the non-dominant stories that clients tell and to use this information in the co-construction of new meanings and the facilitation of change (Rapmund, 2000).

Fourie (1998) and Lifschitz (1987) explain hypnosis from an ecosystemic perspective and illustrate the application of hypnotherapeutic techniques within this framework.

Enrichment

The ecosystemic approach to psychotherapy is still practised world-wide today. An example can be found in a two-day workshop on *Intergenerational Couple Therapy* conducted by Maurizio Andolfi on 9–10 October 2015 at the William Street Family Therapy Centre in Western Australia. (Retrieved from: www.wsftc.com.au/maurizio-andolfi)

A book, *Family Systems Application to Social Work: Training and Clinical Practice*, edited by Karin Gail Lewis, was originally published in 1991, but was again published in 2015 by Routledge in New York as a *Psychology Revivals* title.

Self-evaluation questions

- How do the earlier and later therapeutic orientations in the ecosystemic approach differ?
- Which kind of person do you think would have a better rapport with a therapist who works from a modern ecosystemic perspective: someone with an external locus of control or someone with an internal locus of control? Explain.

15.8.2 Education

By its very nature, an ecosystemic approach assumes that *all the role players in the educational context participate in the co-evolution of the ideas* that surround the educational structure and process. Role players therefore include pupils, students, teachers, parents, administrators and officials representing both the teaching authorities and the government. Accordingly, the needs, expectations and wishes of all these role players would have to be taken into account in the decision-making processes that affect structures, processes and curricula in the educational context. Kourkoutas and Giovazolias (2015) recommend such inclusive interventions in school contexts in Greece, and Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2011) use the ecosystemic approach as the theoretical underpinning of their book to address educational challenges in the South African context.

As far as learning material is concerned, it is clear that the emphasis should lie with larger wholes, or what Bateson (1979) referred to as *wider knowing* and which assumes that the patterns that connect will be studied. Phenomena would therefore be studied in a context – not in terms of simple cause–effect relationships, but rather as part of complex, reciprocal patterns. It is also important, therefore, to become aware of how learning material ties in with broader, practical contexts and how practical training programmes, in which community projects are involved, form part of curricula.

As regards the educational relationship between teacher and pupil, both parties should be recognised as constructors of reality. This would mean that the education process would imply a dialogical conversation between teacher and pupil, and that a consensus would have to be reached through the co-evolution of ideas. The process could not, however, be directed towards discovering one truth, but towards detecting connections that enable pupils to move to a more complex level of meaning.

Bateson's ideas require an acknowledgement of the complexity of the teaching system, in which polarities such as government and governed, student and lecturer, pupil and teacher, family and individual, social culture and individual values, old and new learning material, qualitative and quantitative research approaches, broader perspectives and detail, would have to find a balance and a harmony. It involves a 'both/and' approach, not an 'either/or' approach (Auerswald, 1985; Keeney, 1983a; Tomm, 1988). According to Bateson (1979:239), educators should ask themselves the following question:

Do we ... foster whatever will promote in students ... those wider perspectives which will bring our system back into an appropriate synchrony or harmony between rigour and imagination?



Sharing ideas in a group can be fun
Source: Scott Griessel/Creatista. iStock Photo

Self-evaluation question

- What are the implications of the ecosystemic approach for education?

Activity

Imagine you are a teacher wanting to implement the basic principles of the ecosystemic approach in the classroom. Write down the basic 'rules' you would have to follow when

- preparing the lesson and
- presenting the lesson.

15.8.3 Research

Gurman (1983) distinguished between what he called 'old hat' and *new wave approaches* to research. The old approaches are associated with Newtonian thinking and a positivist paradigm or framework that is often regarded as the only 'scientific' approach (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000), while the new approaches represent the *constructivist thinking* we encounter in the ecosystemic approach.

- In a positivist framework, it is accepted that there is a definite reality that the researcher can know. This reality is then objectively examined from outside, and experimental research methods are used because the observations have to take place under strictly controlled conditions (Guba & Lincoln, 1990).
- In the ecosystemic approach, research is undertaken on the basis of a 'new wave' paradigm (the constructivist paradigm), and here different assumptions apply (Keeney & Morris, 1985).

The assumption of one correct, objective reality is rejected, and it is accepted, instead, that a multitude of realities exist side by side. Research is therefore not an attempt to reveal the truth about a reality or to determine whether a particular representation of the reality is true or correct. It is an *exploration of different realities*.

The researcher is not regarded as an observer, but as a participant in the interaction processes within the system that is being investigated. The research process is therefore seen as a dialectic between experiencing and explanation or description, where the one feeds back recursively into the other (Johnson, 1993). Although a researcher can make a particular punctuation, and focus on, say, the family, he or she keeps in mind that other punctuations, which could include larger or smaller systems, are also possible. The researcher is interested in the interactional relationships between and within systems – in the patterns that connect – and not in separate entities. Auerswald (1968:211) explains this new approach as a change in the focus of the researcher from gathering specific data to looking at the system as a whole and the relationships between the different subsystems that make up the whole.

Experimental methods are not applied under strictly controlled conditions. Instead, the researcher participates in the co-evolution or the shared construction of ideas within the system under investigation. Interactional patterns are explored, and consensus is sought on meanings within the system, but this is still regarded as one possible construction of reality. A researcher can therefore do no more than relate his or her story of a story and, in turn, leave it to those who read it to construct their own stories from it.

Atkinson and Heath (1987) point out that such an approach requires a transparent research process, in which the researcher reveals the material and how it is organised to the reader. It is then up to the reader to decide whether the process whereby the researcher has tried to make sense of the information does, indeed, make sense. The reader does not, therefore, receive the information in the form of processed data on the basis of which certain hypotheses are accepted or rejected, but has insight into the original dialogue and the process of analysis.

Research will be qualitative rather than quantitative, in view of the well-nigh impossibility of expressing the wealth of interactional processes between and within systems in a quantitative manner. Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter (2008) provide valuable guidelines for such qualitative, interpretative research.

In the true spirit of constructivism, a researcher would, however, also be able to accommodate a quantitative construction as a reality (Keeney, 1983a; Wassenaar, 1986). In practice, therefore, a researcher could certainly use quantitative data obtained from test material, but would regard it as one form of communication about the system.

Because the researcher forms part of the research process, a limited number of people are usually involved in the research. These people may, however, represent a wide variety of systems. Thus a family, grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbours, the social worker, the teacher, the school principal, the nurse and the chairperson of the local management council could all be involved, depending on the context.

More recently, some researchers have suggested certain ‘qualitative research tools’ as ways to systematise qualitative research. Below are two examples.

- Sanders and Bell (2011) suggest that The Olson Circumplex Model be used as a systematic approach to couple and family relationships (Retrieved from: <http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/2011/february/sanders>)
- Roller and Lavrakas (2015) suggest that the Total Quality Framework (TQF) allows for a marriage between social constructionism and qualitative research. (Retrieved from: <http://www.researchdesignreview.com/2015/02/11/social-constructionism-quality-in-qualitative-research-design/>)

In the following Enrichment, you will find a number of examples of research that has been done in South Africa from within a constructivist framework.

Enrichment

Examples of South African research and publications

1. Donald, D, Lazarus, S and Lolwana, P (2011). *Educational Psychology in Social Context: Ecosystemic Applications in Southern Africa*. (4th ed.). Southern Africa: Oxford University Press.
2. Kieser-Muller, C (2007). *Needle stick injury and the personal experience of health care workers*. Unpublished MA dissertation: University of Pretoria.
3. Kruger, J, Lifschitz, S and Baloyi, L (2007). Healing practices in communities. In Duncan, N, Naidoo, A, Pillay, J, Bowman, B and Roos, V (eds.) *Community Psychology: Analysis, context and action*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
4. Mabusela, MHM (2014). *Absent fathers: An Ecosystemic exploration of context*. Unpublished MA dissertation: University of South Africa.
5. Mandim, L. (2007). *Conceptual and contextual descriptions of the bi-polar mood disorder spectrum: Commentaries on the state of psychology as reflected through polarised epistemologies*. Unpublished doctoral thesis: University of South Africa.
6. Papakyriakou, XM (2014). *Professional Black South African women: Body image, cultural expectations and the workplace*. Unpublished MA dissertation: University of South Africa.
7. Small, CS (2015). *South African immigrants in New Zealand: Towards an ecomodel of assessment and intervention*. Unpublished doctoral thesis: University of South Africa.
8. Snyders, FJA (2002). *Thinking about thinking about violence: Reflections from South Africa*. Paper delivered at an International Symposium on ‘War, Terrorism and the Family’. Alliant International University, San Diego, California.
9. Van Biljon, EH (2014). *Exploring the meaning of crime prevention within the Tshwane Metropolitan Police Department*. Unpublished MA dissertation: University of South Africa.

15.8.4 The interpretation and handling of aggression

There would be no attempt, from an ecosystemic framework, to suggest universally valid causes of aggression or explanations of it. *The meaning of aggression would, instead, be explored within a given context.* Many forms of functioning can, for example, be experienced as aggressive in the family or in the community, and the precise meaning of aggression would therefore have to be explored within the system concerned. For example, Kourkoutas, Hart and Smirnaki (2012) listen to the voices of the children themselves when studying aggressive behaviours within the school context.

In the family, for example, it would have to be established who behaves aggressively towards whom; how this behaviour is displayed and in what circumstances; what the effect is on other members of the family; and what meaning is assigned to aggression in the family or community, so that the ‘story of aggression’ can be explored in the system, and alternative realities generated or discovered in which destructive behaviour does not have to play a role. It is interesting to note that, in the therapeutic context, an unusual meaning is linked with the word ‘aggression’. As we have already mentioned, ecosystemic therapists should not force their views of what is desirable upon a system. They should do no more than participate in the co-evolution of ideas, and present alternative realities. If a therapist should, however, try to insist on his or her ideas, or prescribe them to the system, he or she becomes guilty of aggression, or more specifically, of ‘violence’!

From this perspective, therapeutic violence is defined as the therapist’s attempt to instruct the family in his or her own pattern. This is consistent with Maturana’s definition of violence: holding an opinion to be true such that another’s opinion is untrue and must change (Cecchin, 1987:411).

Self-evaluation questions

- How do modern forms of ecosystemic therapy differ from earlier orientations?
- What are the implications of the ecosystemic approach for education?
- How does research within the ecosystemic framework differ from positivistic research?
- What unusual meaning is linked to the word ‘aggression’ in the ecosystemic therapeutic context?

15.9 Comparison with other personality theories

Can other theoretical views be accommodated within the ecosystemic approach?

A constructivist framework assumes that each theoretical view represents a given ‘way of looking’ at events, and that any view can, as such, be accommodated within the ecosystemic framework. Accordingly, it is accepted that even an extreme behaviourist view, which subscribes to linear causality, can yield valuable

information within a certain context; and that psychoanalytic interpretations can be offered as one possible description of events. Since the emphasis is on a ‘both/and’ and not an ‘either/or’ approach, there is room for all possible perspectives. We subsequently give attention to a few theories that correspond, in certain ways, with the ecosystemic approach.

Kelly and Carl Rogers have been described as pioneers of the ecosystemic approach (Tyler, 1992), and we therefore turn to their approaches first. We then give a brief discussion of the theories of Jung and Frankl in terms of an ecosystemic framework.

15.9.1 George Kelly

It is obvious that the constructivist thinking that underlies the ecosystemic approach fits in with **Kelly’s construct theory**. Kelly’s idea of *constructive alternativism* is directly related to the ecosystemic notion of the observer who construes reality in a unique way, thereby underlining the existence of alternative realities (Feixas, 1990). However, where Kelly focuses on the hierarchy of constructs within the individual’s construct system, and does not talk about matters such as the family’s construct system, ecosystemic thinking emphasises the interactional patterns of meaning networks of different construers.

Both Kelly (1963) and Bateson (1972; 1979) highlight the role of *differences* in observation. But while Kelly refers mechanistically to two cases that agree and differ from a third, Bateson links the observation of differences to complex recursive networks of meaning. Kelly does refer to the way in which the individual construes other people, and in the REP test, the subject is expected to say, for example, how Mom and Dad are alike, and how they differ from Uncle Dan. Interpersonal relationships are, therefore, linked with constructions in this way, but the focus remains on the construct system of the construer, while ecosystemic thinking stresses the construer as part of the larger system of constructions.

Kelly places great emphasis on the role of *anticipation and prediction* in human functioning. Although this idea is taken up in the ecosystemic approach, we can nevertheless detect some differences. In their therapy, the Milan group, for example, initially made use of hypotheses about the functioning of the family, and just as Kelly suggests in his theory, they tested information against these hypotheses. In ecosystemic therapy, hypotheses can also be put forward as alternative realities, and the system then decides whether or not they fit. But in modern ecosystemic therapy there is less emphasis on prediction, and it is precisely the unpredictability of processes that is highlighted. Thus ecosystemic therapists may well use future-oriented questions, but the aim is not to make predictions but to debate alternative realities (Penn, 1985).

According to construct theory, the person makes certain predictions and then retains or expands the construct system on the basis of the feedback he or she receives. The ecosystemic approach, by contrast, holds that information flows into

the system from within or without in the form of alternative realities. In a sense, the system discovers realities that serve as positive feedback and bring about change, or it rejects other realities. The system does not, therefore, make hypotheses about what will be right or wrong, but becomes involved in a process of co-evolution of ideas.

15.9.2 Carl Rogers

Carl Rogers' self concept theory does not display such obvious parallels with the ecosystemic approach, and it is quite apparent that some strategic and structural therapists did not adhere to Rogers' conditions of empathy, warmth, respect and congruence. There were, however, those who regarded Rogers' conditions as essential for all forms of family therapy. Feldman (cited in O'Leary, 1989:311) refers, for example, to Minuchin's injunction that the therapist should 'feel the family's pain', and to Whitaker's belief that 'a family that is worth treating is worth loving'.

If one delves more deeply, it becomes clear that there are considerable similarities between Rogers' basic approach and the ecosystemic approach. As is the case with second-order change in the ecosystemic approach, change, for Rogers, consists of shifts that are made in cognitive perceptions or meanings (especially about the self), and one change influences the entire functioning of the individual and his or her interaction with others – the entire system is therefore influenced. In addition, Rogers respects the ability of humans to take their own decisions and to actualise their potential. Thus the therapist simply creates the climate within which growth takes place. The ecosystemic therapist enters the system in the same way and offers alternative realities as possibilities, but respects the autonomy of the system when it comes to making shifts that suit the system (O'Leary, 1989).

From Rogers' (1982a) article entitled *New World – New Person*, it is clear that he greeted the move away from Newtonian thinking towards ecosystemic thinking with enthusiasm. He suggests that the 'new world' founded upon the new epistemology will need 'new people'. The qualities they will need, according to Rogers, are strongly reminiscent of the ecosystemic description of healthy functioning, in which the functioning of both the individual and the system should be maximised. Rogers (1982a) maintains that these 'new people' will experience life in terms of a constantly changing process; they will live in a comfortable relationship with nature; will share power with others; will co-operate in the interests of the larger community; will strive towards wholeness; will be non-materialistic; will find meaning outside of the self; will be open to experience; and will respect the integrity of all other people.

15.9.3 Carl Jung

Jung's theory shows remarkable similarities with the ecosystemic approach in respect of the emphasis given in both approaches to the role of balance in optimal functioning. In Jung's theory, the process of *individuation*, like the ecosystemic

notion of *dynamic equilibrium*, refers to the dynamic search for balance between subsystems, and is postulated as a process that can never reach completion. Where Jung concentrates on the individual as a system, the idea of balance is expanded in the ecosystemic approach to include other systems outside of the individual.

Jung pays particular attention to the balance between conscious and unconscious processes, whereas in the ecosystemic approach there is no specific reference to levels of consciousness. However, if we bear in mind that unconscious levels of functioning (which could include the archetypes) can be regarded as subsystems of the individual, there is no reason to suppose that these *unconscious levels* cannot be accommodated in the ecosystemic approach.

It is also important to note that many of the ideas of the strategic therapists were based on Milton Erickson's work in hypnosis. According to Erickson (Madanes, 1981), part of an experience or communication is lost when something is made conscious. This is one reason why metaphors and imagery are important ways of communicating in the ecosystemic approach. This is also linked, to some extent, with the part played by symbolism in Jung's theory. As in Jung's theory, dreams and various kinds of artistic expression can also tell stories about the system in the ecosystemic approach.

15.9.4 Viktor Frankl

As in the ecosystemic approach, **Viktor Frankl's theory** places the responsibility for decision-making with the individual concerned. According to Frankl, the basic motive of human beings is *the will to meaning*, and change, as with second-order change, is directed at the changing of deep-seated convictions and meanings. In both cases, the key issue is assigning a meaning to events that will make it possible for the person not to become trapped in the events themselves.

In *logotherapy*, the search for meaning outside the self is central, and this is echoed in the ecosystemic approach, where the focus is not exclusively on the self, but on the patterns of interaction within and between systems. It is, incidentally, interesting to note that the technique of *paradoxical intention* that Frankl uses in logotherapy is in many ways similar to the paradox technique used by the Milan group.

Self-evaluation question

- Which personality theories, or aspects of them, are reconcilable with the ecosystemic approach?

15.10 Evaluation of the approach

There is little doubt as to the important contributions that have been made – and are still being made – to psychology by ecosystemic epistemology. But it is important to note that ecosystemic thinking developed gradually, and that criticism of earlier views does not necessarily apply to later thinking. There were phases

when followers of the approach went overboard with certain ideas – when the pendulum swung to its outer limits and reached balance again only at a later stage.

There was, for example, the phase during which strategic and structural therapeutic techniques placed the therapist in a position of such power that critics expressed their concern over this issue. This concern was voiced not only with regard to the definition of human functioning as a ‘game’ – even a ‘dirty game’ – but also, and more strongly, with regard to the role of the therapist as the ‘master player of games’, who had to play games more skilfully than his or her clients.

Concern arose, too, about the so-called neutrality of the therapist, which led some therapists to work in a cold, distant, uninvolved way. Some critics were also worried that the individual would be overlooked because of the emphasis on larger systems. The focus on interactional patterns could also make it possible for therapists to concentrate on patterns of meaning to the extent that they lost sight of the living, feeling human beings involved in interpersonal relationships.

The central place currently occupied in the approach by constructivism does, however, allow therapists to enter the therapeutic context with their complete repertoires of human experiences. Thus, instead of being master spies or strategists, they can still bring an atmosphere of warmth, congruence and empathy to the therapeutic context; give heed to both intellect and affect (Real, 1990); and offer realities from any theoretical perspective as alternative constructions. This gives the therapist the freedom to participate creatively in the therapeutic process.

Such an approach is clearly illustrated in Keeney’s (1990) work entitled *Improvisational therapy*. According to Real (1990:270), if the therapist enters into the therapeutic interaction with the client with an open mind, a willingness to listen and take heed of what is said, and show empathy and respect, the therapist will be able to participate freely and generate creative alternative constructions.

Although constructivism, which plays an important part in current ecosystemic thinking, is regarded as an extremely useful point of departure, attention is nevertheless drawn to the dangers of taking it too far. In addition, criticism is levelled against adherence to an extreme or radical constructivism, where the existence of an objective reality is completely denied (Hoffman, 1990; Tjersland, 1990).

Keeney (1983b) is strongly opposed to a total denial of an objective reality, while Atkinson and Heath (1987) also point out that a constructivist position does, in fact, accept the existence of an external reality, but holds that this reality cannot be accessed through objective observation. As was discussed earlier, Gergen (1985), in the same vein, refers to a ‘social construction of reality’ (social constructionism), which implies that certain similarities will actually exist between the realities that people construct within the same social context; and Speed (1991) proposes an alternative, which he terms *co-constructivism*.

By co-constructivism is meant the view that what we know arises in a relationship between the knower and the known. It takes for granted that a structured reality exists but recognizes that that reality is constructed or mediated in the sense that different aspects are highlighted according to ideas that people individually or in groups have about it. (Speed, 1991:401)

As regards therapeutic practice, it must be stressed that, in addition to its contributions in the traditional consulting room context, the ecosystemic approach is also particularly valuable in an age where the needs of so many people just cannot be attended to on an individual basis, in expensive one-to-one relationships. Dealing with problems in a larger context simply makes sense. The problems of the individual can, in this way, be addressed in relation to the family, the community, the nation or even the world; and the answers involve and reach many people. Bigger solutions are sought, and a wider understanding of the functions of role players in the larger contexts is made available. Different perspectives can be placed next to one another without presenting one of them as necessarily representing 'the truth'. New realities can then be created through the co-evolution of ideas – even if the process is sometimes long and exhausting. It is also clear that ecosystemic principles seem to be especially valuable in the ongoing process of negotiation in South Africa. The ecosystemic approach in South Africa is more specifically illustrated in the Enrichment below.

In conclusion, it is perhaps important to remember that many of the ecosystemic ideas were brought forth by Bateson's wonder at the organisation of phenomena in the world around him. From the composition of the body parts of a crab to the solar system – everything filled him with awe (Bateson, 1972; 1979). Perhaps the utility of the ecosystemic approach lies in precisely the presence or absence of such awe. In a tribute to Gregory Bateson, Keeney (1983b:55) has this to say:

Gregory's ability to be in tune with the sacredness of relationships had the effect of his accepting the butterfly, schizophrenic and scholar as equally important for his respect, time and love.

Enrichment

The ecosystemic approach in South Africa

Ecosystemic thinking has already had a profound influence on psychology and related helping professions in South Africa. In the light of the enormous diversity of the South African community, and the political developments in the country, the ecosystemic approach offers a way of seeing that can include larger wholes and can penetrate the boundaries between subsystems.

Ecosystemic thinking already forms part of the curricula for educating psychologists and social workers at many South African universities. A great many figures of international status in the field of ecosystemic therapy, such as Maurizio Andolfi, Edgar Auerswald, Donald Bloch, Luigi Boscolo, Mony Elkaïm, Bradford Keeney, Carlos Sluzki, Duke Stanton, Judy Landau-Stanton, Bob Wendt and Carl Whitaker, have visited the country and presented workshops or delivered conference papers.

(continued)

By the same token, South African therapists have undergone training in ecosystemic therapy overseas, and have, in turn, been invited to share their expertise with the outside world.

The University of South Africa pioneered the training of psychotherapists in an ecosystemic framework. The approach rapidly gained acceptance at other institutions, however, and currently plays an important nationwide role in training programmes for psychotherapists.

The South African Institute of Marital and Family Therapy (SAIMFT) was also instrumental in disseminating ecosystemic thinking in South Africa. This institute hosts a biennial international congress, and the papers presented at the 1988 congress in Cape Town were published in *Family therapy in South Africa today* (Mason & Rubenstein, 1989). The 1990 congress held at Broederstroom near Pretoria drew particular attention to the work that is being done in South Africa from within an ecosystemic framework. A large number of the papers delivered at that congress have been published in a book entitled *From diversity to healing* (Mason, Rubenstein & Shuda, 1992; Moore, 1993).

Auerswald (cited in Mason, Rubenstein & Shuda, 1992:18) gives the following advice: 'Get out there and start the conversation.' It is clear that hundreds of people in South Africa's helping professions have already heeded this advice. Lifschitz, Kgoadi and Van Niekerk (1992), for example, tell us of a psychotherapeutic facility in the community of Mamelodi, just outside Pretoria, and show how therapists can contribute to an improved quality of life through their connection with this community (Kruger, Lifschitz and Baloyi, 2007). Pistorius (1992) reports on how an ecosystemic framework is used at the Medical University of South Africa (Medunsa) to bring about liaison and reciprocal feedback between lecturers, students and personnel of the St Peter's Clinic and the Winterveldt community.

Candotti and Mason (1992) acquaint us with an integrated programme of family and pre-school interventions in a community centre in Chatsworth, Durban, while Phillips (1992) brings to the public's notice the opening of the first Centre for Family Therapy at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town. Helpers are encouraged to move into the larger community context and not just to become involved in one-to-one sessions with clients. In addition, attention is drawn to the fact that, in South Africa, it is necessary to involve wider ecological contexts and, for example, to take account of the role of the traditional healer and cultural rituals (Moore, 1993).

At the congresses of the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), the papers delivered by academics and psychologists in private practice, hospitals and research institutes have also provided abundant examples of work that is being undertaken in an ecosystemic framework.

The following website was created as the face of the Ecosystemic Psychology organisation. The website was constructed and is managed by Philip Baron (2014) from the University of Johannesburg.

www.ecosystemic-psychology-org.za

Self-evaluation question

- How useful do you think the ecosystemic approach can be in the South African context?

15.11 Suggested reading

Bateson, CJ (1979). *Mind and Nature: A necessary unity*. New York: Dutton.

Charlton, NG (2010). *Understanding Gregory Bateson: Mind, Beauty and the Sacred Earth*. New York: Suny Press.

Gergen, KJ (2009). *Relational Being: Beyond the Individual and Community*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Keeney, BP (1983a). *Aesthetics of change*. New York: Guilford Press.

Kruger, J, Lifschitz, S and Baloyi, L (2007). Healing practices in communities. In Duncan, N, Naidoo, A, Pillay, J, Bowman, B and Roos, V (eds.) *Community Psychology: Analysis, context and action*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Minuchin, S, Reiter, MD and Borda, C (2013). *The Craft of Family Therapy: Challenging Certainties*. New York: Routledge.



Chapter 16

Eastern perspectives

Henning Viljoen

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16.1 Outcomes

- Understand the important **difference between Western and Eastern psychology**, especially with reference to the self.
- Grasp the Vedanta (Hindu perspective) view of the person based on the **non-dualistic view of a single fundamental reality**.
- Understand the Vedanta concepts *Atman* (real self) and *jiva* (self in the phenomenal world).
- Explain the Vedanta views of **consciousness** and **psychological functioning**.
- Understand how the Vedanta **law of karma** explains individual behaviour.
- Grasp **self-realisation** from a **Vedanta perspective** and explain the difference between the Vedantic method of self-realisation and psychotherapy.
- Evaluate the **contribution of Vedanta** as a perspective in personology.
- Grasp the **Buddhist view of the person** and what is meant by **Buddhist psychology**.
- Understand the Buddhist *I-as-process* in contrast to the Western *I-as-identity* and the **Buddhist view of consciousness**.
- Understand how the Buddhist **law of karma** explains individual differences.
- Grasp the Buddhist view of **optimal functioning** and **pathological behaviour**.
- Understand the difference between **meditation** and **psychotherapy**.
- Evaluate **Buddhism** as a **perspective in personology**.

16.2 Introduction and background

Why is it necessary to take note of an Eastern perspective?

Modern communication techniques are making the world a smaller place, where the West, the East and Africa are making more and more direct contact with one another, and a mutual understanding and knowledge of the life and worldviews of each is becoming more essential. In the past, the only personality theorists whose work showed evidence of an Eastern influence were William James, Carl Jung, Erich Fromm and Abraham Maslow.

Today, however, Western psychologists are coming to realise that they cannot claim to possess universal truths about human functioning, and that there is an Eastern perspective that has as much a claim to the truth as does Western psychology. The growing interest in Eastern psychology, by Western psychologists, can be contributed to the Eastern theories' comprehensive perception of states of **consciousness** that have thus far to a certain extent been ignored in the West.

KEY TERM

consciousness: represents the beginning and end of all human experience

How does Eastern psychology differ from Western psychology?

The most important difference between Western and Eastern psychology lies in their *epistemological* and *ontological points of departure*. Western psychology comes from a philosophical and scientific tradition which, in modern times, is strongly embedded in a *positivist objective view of the person and the empirical paradigm*.

Mainstream Western psychology can therefore be typified as *scientific, analytical* and *reductionistic*, with the goal of analysing, predicting and controlling human behaviour and is influenced by the Western rational, individualistic and more extroverted lifestyle. Eastern psychology and insights in understanding human functioning, by contrast, originate from a religious and metaphysical tradition such as Vedanta, Shamkhya, Yoga and Buddhism, with *subjective observation* and *direct subjective experience as its paradigm*, and it reflects the more introverted, collectivist and mystical Eastern lifestyle. According to Menon (2010) and Cornelissen, Misra and Varna (2014), in the East the focus is on the person having the experience (i.e., an inward focus and inner knowledge), and the method is based on first-person introspection. In the West, however, the focus is on the object of experience (i.e., an outward focus and objective knowledge) based on the method of third-person observation and measurement. The Eastern psychology could thus be typified as *intuitive* and *integrating*, with its major aims to acquire knowledge of the soul and of how to set the soul free through **self-realisation** (Paranjpe, 1984; Ho, 1988; Kalpana, 2012). According to Jung (1958a), the Western person believes ‘in doing’ while the Eastern person believes in ‘impassive being’.

KEY TERM

self-realisation: realisation of *Atman* (the real self) by transcending *jiva* (the temporary changing aspect of the self)

Atwood and Maltin (1991) give a useful summary of the life and worldviews to which Eastern psychology is anchored in that they say that one should aim at becoming aware of the world as one inseparable reality and that everything is inseparably connected, interrelated and a unity.

What this means is that, whereas Western psychology revolves around *individualism* focusing on the personality of the individual, Eastern psychology centres around *collectivism* and is more interested in the person’s harmonious connectedness to fellow humans, society, nature and the cosmos. Hsu (1971) feels so strongly about this that he regards personality that is based on individualism as a purely Western construct that disregards the many lives in society and thus misses the human way of existence.

Hsu (1971:29) avoids using the term ‘personality’, and prefers the Chinese term *ren*, which means ‘personage’. Kalpana (2012) is of the opinion that the term ‘personality’ does not entail all aspects and essential qualities of personality such as the Indian concept *Swabhaava*, which incorporates the ‘spiritual personality’. Following his therapeutic work in India and Japan, Roland (1988) comes to a similar conclusion. He maintains that, in the East, little prominence is given to the *individualised self*, which takes pride of place in Western psychology and revolves around the autonomy and actualisation of an ego, ‘I’ or self as the core of the personality. According to Roland, the *contextualised self* is a more central idea in Eastern psychology, together with an emphasis on the *familial self* (a ‘we-centred self’ that is manifested in two-way, symbiotic interpersonal relationships) and a *spiritual self* (which is manifested in transcendent relationships).

Roland (1988) points out that the stronger disposition towards collectivism and spirituality that is found in the East does not signal an absence of individuality or self-actualisation. In the East, self-actualisation refers to *transcendence of the self* rather than the *extension of the self*, which is how it is understood in the West. In Western psychology, the ego, 'I' or self is central and must be preserved, extended or actualised at all costs. Osho (2012) states that Western psychology's aim is to 'fortify the individual's ego' in order to become less neurotic and function better in society, whereas the Eastern aim is to 'dissolve rather than to strengthen the ego'. According to the Eastern perspective the individual can only attain his or her ultimate destiny through transcending the self (as in Hinduism) or even renouncing the self, 'I' or ego (as in Buddhism).

Enrichment

Western psychology vs Eastern spirituality

Osho (2012) – a widely followed guru – gives a very insightful comparison between Western psychology (Freud, Jung, Adler and Assagioli) and Eastern spirituality's approach to human functioning and changing behaviour.

Osho's main problem with Western psychology is the concentration on analysis instead of synthesis – it focuses on 'analysing and picking apart' to understand individual behaviour and 'to make a better individual', rather than making a person whole and connected with everything. A Western individual is trapped in an ego, and it is only through **meditation** that the self can be freed from the entrapment of the ego to become spiritually free and to realise the self.

He states that if a person is physically ill, a doctor is needed; when the person is psychologically ill, help can be obtained from a psychologist such as Freud, Jung and Assagioli. But when a person suffers from an existential illness neither the physician or psychologist/psychiatrist can be helpful. Existential illness is spiritual, incorporating the person as a whole: body and mind is a whole, and the whole transcends the parts. In order to attain wholeness an approach based on synthesis (Vedantic yoga or Buddhist meditation) rather than analysis is needed.

KEY TERM

meditation: primarily, the withdrawal of attention from the outside world

Paranjpe (1988) comments that there is a discrepancy between indigenous Eastern psychology, which reflects the traditional Eastern view of the person, and the discipline of psychology as it is taught at some Eastern universities. Colonial influences have left their stamp on many psychology departments in the East, in the form of a Western psychological tradition that is still drawing its inspiration from the intellectual legacies of Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Darwin and Helmholtz and reveals little evidence of the influence of Buddha, Confucius or Sankara. Rao (2007) also highlights the fact that few students are taught about Hindu/Indian psychology in modern universities in India, relegating the Hindu insights about human functioning to religion and philosophy. The second half of the previous century, however, saw the publication of works by Eastern psychologists such as Sinha (1965; 1984) and Paranjpe (1984; 1988) in India and Hsu (1971),

Ching (1980) and Ho (1988) in China, with works pointing out how inappropriate Euro-American psychological models and theories are for understanding the functioning of the Eastern person. Misra and Paranjpe (2012) state that in the twenty-first century the journey toward indigenous psychology in India:

... shows that the initial emphasis on the replication of Western studies has given way to socially relevant research... [aimed] toward understanding the psychocultural contexts ... Academics have come to appreciate the depth, wisdom, and insightfulness of Indian thought traditions, and that it is possible to develop a scientific psychology based upon them.

This impetus gave rise to a spate of publications blending scientific ways with indigenous concepts about Indian Psychology (Misra & Mohanty, 2002; Rao, Paranjpe & Dalal, 2008; Cornelissen, Misra & Varna, 2011; Misra, 2011a; Misra, 2011b).

Despite the differences between the Western and Eastern views of the person, Ho (1988:70) makes the plea that, in acknowledging these differences, we should not exclude one perspective to the detriment of the other. He believes they should be seen as complementary points of view, because ‘... neither, when taken alone, is capable of yielding a complete account of the total complexity of psychological phenomena’.

What must not be overlooked is that the concept of Western psychology comprises a variety of divergent approaches, such as behaviourism, depth psychology and the person-oriented and cognitive theories. Similarly, the concept of Eastern psychology is also an umbrella term comprehending different religious and philosophical approaches founded upon Hinduism and Buddhism. In addition, Taylor (1988:104) points out that within Hinduism and Buddhism, there are even finer distinctions that have to be made. Vedanta, for example, is sometimes incorrectly taken as representing the whole of Hinduism, with no regard for Nyaya, Vaisesika, Mimamsa, Yoga and Sankhya, while the Abhidhamma tradition is regarded as representing the whole of Buddhism, thereby overlooking the different branches of Zen Buddhism or the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition.

Nonetheless, this chapter presents no more than an overview of a broad Eastern perspective, and a detailed discussion of the different strands within this perspective lies beyond its scope. Accordingly, attention will be paid to Vedanta as representing a Hindu perspective and to Abhidhamma as representing a Buddhist perspective.

Self-evaluation question

- Explain the difference between Eastern and Western psychology with specific reference to the different views of the self.

Personality according to Vedanta

16.3 Background

What is Vedanta?

KEY TERM

Vedanta: an orthodox Indian philosophical tradition

We can trace the origin of **Vedanta** as an orthodox Indian philosophical tradition and religious lifestyle to philosophical texts (*Upanishads*), dating back to around 2000 BC. Some of the philosophical approaches are reflected in the text of the epic battleground dialogue, *Bhagavad-Gita*, in which Sri Krishna, as the ‘Supreme Personality of Godhead’, instructs his intimate friend Arjuna in the *science of self-realisation*. At the beginning of the Christian era, the Upanishad texts were studied, interpreted and organised by Badarayana according to the Vedantic tradition. They were then re-interpreted by various people. One of the most influential interpretations of the Upanishad texts and the *Bhagavad-Gita* was that of Sankara (788–820 AD), whose views are known as the ‘non-dualistic’ Vedanta. Sankara’s work in Eastern philosophy is compared with that of the West’s Aristotle in terms of logic, scope and influence. Although Vedanta comprises a number of different schools of thought, we deal only with Sankara’s ‘non-dualistic’ view. (Paranjpe, 1988; Menon, 2006).

16.4 The worldview and view of the person underlying the perspective

Why is the worldview included in the discussion of the view of the person who underlies this perspective?

KEY TERM

Brahman: one single fundamental reality

It is not possible to separate the view of the person and the worldview inherent in Sankara’s non-dualistic (*Advaita*) approach. The primary hypothesis is the existence of a single fundamental reality, **Brahman**, which is omnipresent, without form or feature, and basically indescribable. *Brahman* is a metaphysical concept which in lay terms could be depicted as the ‘cosmic soul’. This Ultimate reality enfolds, transfuses and transcends the ‘phenomenal world’, or the world of objects, which humans know and experience through their senses and which they sometimes erroneously accept as the only and true reality. The one reality, *Brahman*, can be known and experienced in two ways:

- through a transcognitive state of consciousness in which the transcendent, formless and featureless *Brahman* is experienced
- through the ordinary senses and reason with which we know the phenomenal world. (Paranjpe, 1988; Ross Reat, 1990; Menon, 2006).

Paranjpe (1988) characterises this Vedantic approach as a combination of a monistic ontology with a dualistic epistemology – in other words, a single reality that can be known in two ways.

The real individual self (*Atman*) is essentially the same as the single, formless *Brahman*, and it forms a partial unity with *Brahman*. In lay terms it can be depicted as the ‘individual soul’ or self. Accordingly, the individual’s real self, like the one reality, can only be experienced in a transcognitive state of consciousness where the separation of subject and object, the knower and the known, as properties of the ordinary states of the consciousness – the phenomenal world – disappears.

Although the phenomenal world is experienced as reality in the ordinary cognitive state, it is only in the higher transcognitive state that the ‘I’ of the phenomenal world is experienced as invalid and therefore as a ‘non-self’. Paranjpe (1988) refers to the familiar metaphor of an object that looks like a snake to illustrate the invalidity of the phenomenal world. A traveller at dusk sees a snake lying across the road. He screams for help and when another person casts a light on the snake it is discovered that it is a rope. The impression that the object is a snake becomes invalid only when it is recognised as being a rope – it is only from a higher consciousness that the phenomenal world can be observed as an illusion.

What are the characteristics, if any, of this single fundamental reality?

Although *Brahman* is characterised as indescribable, three properties are nevertheless attributed to the essential reality. These are *being*, *consciousness* and *bliss*. Because there is in essence no difference between the real self (*Atman*) and *Brahman*, the essential properties of the individual are also being and consciousness, directed towards bliss. The fact that in everyday life people experience pain and suffering, and not bliss, can be imputed to their ensnarement in the limited, erroneous perception of themselves in the phenomenal world. It is only when people experience their real selves and the essential reality from a higher state of consciousness that they achieve true bliss.

Vedanta pays a great deal of attention to the methods and techniques for encountering the real self and the one reality through transcognitive experience (*anubhava*). (See the Enrichment on the Vedantic method for self-realisation further on.)

Transcognitive experience is regarded as the only reliable way of acquiring knowledge of the real nature of the self and the essential world (Paranjpe, 1984; 1988; Osho, 2012).

Self-evaluation question

- Describe the Vedantic worldview and view of the person and how it differs from a Western worldview and view of the person.

16.5 The structure of the personality

If the Vedantic perspective recognises only one reality, does it perceive an individual person to have certain structural personality features?

Vedanta identifies two aspects of the person:

KEY TERMS

Atman: the real individual self

jiva: the temporary changing aspect of the individual

- **Atman**, the real self, which is a permanent, unchanging basis for the living organism and a partial unity with *Brahman*
- **jiva**, which is erroneously taken as the real self of the individual; *jiva* is, however, the temporary, changing aspect of the individual, which is manifested in the 'I' and 'mine' as a means of representing the person in the phenomenal world.

Since *Atman*, or the real self, is part of *Brahman*, which encompasses everything, *Atman* is also the all-inclusive core of *jiva*'s consciousness, which means that in the phenomenal world, *jiva* is taken to be the real self. The real self is, like *Brahman*, indescribable and can only be encountered on higher levels of consciousness through transcognitive experiences.

Paranjpe (1984; 1988) points out that, just as Freud defines personality in terms of structural components (id, ego and superego), Vedanta uses the concept *jiva* as a structural metaphor for describing the constituent parts of the individual in the phenomenal world. Literally, the concept means 'life' or 'living being', and in terms of it, the person is seen as a multi-level entity, like an onion, made up of five concentric sheaths (see Figure 16.1).

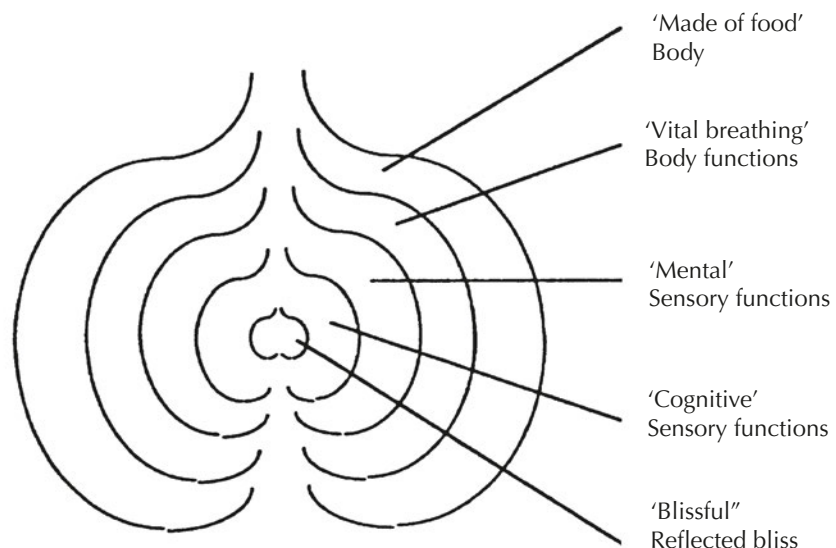


Figure 16.1 Paranjpe's (1988:190) representation of the Vedantic model of the personality according to the five sheaths of *jiva*
Source: Praeger

The five concentric sheaths can be distinguished (Sankara, 1921, cited in Paranipe, 1988; Brahma-prana, 2016; Jnaneshvara Bharati, 2016), as follows:

- The outermost sheath of the *jiva*, which is ‘made of food’, refers to the body.
- The second layer is the sheath of the ‘vital breathing’. This refers to breath as the life-giving principle that maintains bodily functioning.
- The third layer is the ‘mental’ sheath, which includes sensory functioning – it is through the senses that we know the phenomenal world. This sheath is the home of the ego, and of all egoistic desires and behaviour that can be identified as ‘I’ and ‘mine’.
- The fourth sheath is the ‘cognitive’ sheath and refers to the intellect. It includes reason, through which we know the world.
- The fifth, innermost sheath is the ‘blissful’ sheath, which reflects the bliss of the real self, but is not the real self.

Paranipe (1988) points out that the parts of the *jiva* are hierarchically organised in terms of the importance each has for encountering the real self, *Atman*, with the core being more important than the periphery. Bodily needs and desires are therefore not accorded much weight.

How does the Vedantic perspective account for psychological functioning and consciousness?

Vedanta distinguishes four *psychological functions* in addition to sensory and motor functions (Paranipe, 1984; Akhilananda, 2014):

- **mind** (*manas*), which is manifested in the cognitive functions of analysis, differentiation and integration
- **intellect** (*buddhi*), the volitional activities involved in planning a particular course of action
- **ego** (*ahamkara*), which manifests as self-consciousness in determining one’s own identity
- **psyche** (*citta*), which is involved in the memory traces of activities and experiences of the past. It is therefore a store of **karma** (lawful influences that determine behaviour) from the past, which is important in explaining the behaviour of the present. (The influence of karma in determining behaviour is discussed in ‘*The dynamics of human functioning*’.)

KEY TERM

karma: the factor that motivates a person’s behaviour at a given moment

According to the Vedantic approach, the individual may be in one of four *states of consciousness*, namely wakefulness (*jagrti*), dreaming (*svapna*), deep sleep (*susupti*) and the ‘Fourth State’ (*turiya*), which is also called the trance state of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*.

Jiva’s extra-perspective, or externally directed functioning, takes place in the state of wakefulness and focuses largely on egoistic satisfaction and pleasure. In the dream state, an intermediate state between wakefulness and deep sleep, *jiva*’s externally directed sensory and motor activities close down, although the



The Nirvikalpa Samadhi trance state
Source: rafo – Fotolia

psychological functions are still manifested in dreams – in dreams the person remains part of the phenomenal world. *Atman* and *Brahman* are experienced only in the higher Fourth State of consciousness. This is a state that does not occur by chance, and cannot, like hypnosis, be induced by another person. It has to be attained by the individual himself or herself through meditation (Paranjpe, 1994; Ross Reat, 1990).

The higher Fourth State of consciousness is not commonly experienced and is difficult to describe, since its nature is generally expressed in metaphors or verse. Paranjpe (1984:218), for example, quotes the following Upanishad verse to describe the inexpressible nature of the state:

From where the words retreat with the mind, having failed to reach.

He, who attains that bliss need be afraid of none.

In the dualistic existence of the individual, there is a separation of subject and object (for example, when one smells, sees or tastes something), but in the Fourth State this separation dissolves. The knower becomes his or her own object of knowledge, since there is no 'thing' or 'other' to know, see or talk to. Paranjpe (1984:218–219) illustrates this with the following Upanishad text:

For where there is duality, as it were,

there one sees another; there one smells another;

there one tastes another; there one hears another; there one thinks of another; there one touches another; there one understands another.

But where everything has become just one's own self, then whereby and whom would one see ... smell ...

Lo whereby would one understand the understander?

Sri Chinmoy (2016) describes this height of divine consciousness as entering into nirvikalpa samadh, where the own heart becomes very large and the universe that initially feels to be infinitely larger than the self to becoming very small.

This is why this state is sometimes also described as an oceanic state in which, like a drop of water, the person is surrounded by an infinity of drops that are difficult to distinguish from one another. It is a state in which one no longer experiences a distinct individuality or a unique ego-identity but only the real self, as complete bliss and harmony.

Enrichment

The Vedantic method of self-realisation

Paranjpe (1988) states that, following Sankara's interpretation, the Vedantic method of self-realisation requires an initial preparatory stage in which four aids to self-realisation have to be acquired.

These aids are the following:

The individual needs to distinguish clearly between the permanent and the impermanent self. The things that remain unchanged through a person's life must be clearly determined so as to serve as a basis for a personal identity, and this, in turn, must be distinguished from the constantly changing, temporary 'I' or 'ego'. This distinction is more than just a cognitive awareness of what remains unchanged. Thus a person who acknowledges that his or her material possessions and social selves are temporary and changing, but who cannot relinquish the emotional investment in them, is not yet ready for self-realisation. Self-realisation involves more than just a cognitive exercise.

The individual must become detached from any gain or profit that can be had from the impermanent or the permanent reality. For as long as the individual still strives for success, power or fame, his or her existence remains dominated by the pursuit of 'external' goals. The only criteria for measuring success, power and fame are external objects. Enduring peace and tranquillity are not to be found in external objects; they lie in the deepest regions of inner subjectivity.

The following virtues must be cultivated:

Consciousness must be controlled so that it can come to rest in a single object (*sama*) and nothing else remains in consciousness.

The senses must be withdrawn from objects of pleasure (*dama*).

Consciousness must be prevented from being dominated by external objects (*uparati*).

Tolerance and endurance have to be learnt so that misfortune can be experienced without becoming overwhelmed or anxious (*titiksha*).

Well-considered belief in the teachings of the Vedantic writings and the teacher (*guru*) should be evinced.

Complete tranquillity of consciousness should be sought in the formless *Brahman*, without being led astray by the desires of the *jiva*.

An intense desire for release from egoism and ignorance.

With these virtues as a preparation, Vedanta prescribes a merciless, critical investigation of the real nature of the self as a method of attaining self-realisation. According to Paranjpe (1988), this investigation consists of the following stages:

A careful 'listening' to the non-dualistic teachings of the Vedanta texts (*sravana*).

Repeated, profound reflection on and consideration of what is learnt from the teachings (*manana*). In this stage, all doubts and possible reservations must be fully worked through. As Paranjpe (1988:205) puts it:

The doubts and objections may be based on any and all sources of knowledge: observation, inference, argument, scriptural statements, and so on. One is expected to try to carefully examine and refute them in a rational manner ... It is expected that careful, rational assessment of all alternative viewpoints will lead to a courage of conviction and single-minded devotion to one's chosen path ... Every doubt and objection should be satisfactorily resolved, so that one is able to concentrate the mind fully and without distraction.

(continued)

Becoming completely absorbed in contemplation of the formless *Brahman*, so that other thoughts no longer penetrate the consciousness. Attention and thoughts are withdrawn from all objects, and the person meditates with full concentration on the real, inner self.

The Vedantic method of self-realisation is therefore, by and large, a self-help programme for **attaining** higher levels of fulfilment.

Self-evaluation questions

- Describe the Vedanta concepts *Atman* and *jiva* and note the constituent parts and functions of *jiva*.
- Describe the Vedanta views of consciousness and psychological functions and compare them to the views of Freud and Jung.

16.6 The dynamics of human functioning

Does Vedanta provide any explanation for the dynamics of individual human behaviour?

Vedanta offers not so much an explanation of individual manifestations of behaviour, but a comprehensive theoretical view of the lawfulness of the universe. Because Vedanta acknowledges only a single reality, it also makes no distinction between the explanatory principles that underlie the material and moral spheres.

16.6.1 The law of karma

In Vedanta, both lifeless matter (soil, rocks or water) and living things (plants, animals and humans) are constantly subject to change. This change does not, however, take place in a random way. It is regulated by the **law of karma**. This deterministic law postulates that nothing happens by chance, but that every action, and therefore every life, is determined by essential, pre-existing forces locked upon inescapable, necessary outcomes. In contrast with certain Western theistic views, this law leaves no room for godly intervention in events or behaviour, since all events and behaviour are the outcome of lawful interaction between the component parts. Paranjpe (1988:192) puts this as follows:

The idea that all changes in the world are caused by lawful interaction of the components of which things are made suggests that all events in the world are natural occurrences, not the results of mysterious interventions by wanton spirits or deities.

All human physical and psychological functioning is therefore the result of karma. Unlike the causal laws of Newton, which apply exclusively to natural science phenomena, the law of karma applies to the moral as well as to the natural sphere. According to this law, each person has to bear the unavoidable consequences of his or her good and bad deeds – in other words, ‘we reap what we sow’ (Jayaram, 2016). Because Vedanta accepts the *principle of the reincarnation* of the person after death, the law of karma also influences the incarnated soul in its next life.

KEY TERM

law of karma:
deterministic law
postulating that nothing
happens by chance but that
every action is determined
by pre-existing forces

The influence of karma can be resisted only through perfect knowledge of the real self. Paranjpe (1984:59) explains this as follows:

If the account is not settled by the end of the present life cycle, the balance will be carried forward to the next incarnation of the soul ... there is a continuous chain of effects of karma action which can be cut short as soon as a person attains knowledge of his real self.

The law of karma directs and determines not just the life of the individual person; it also offers the rationale for the Hindu's social organisation in terms of the hierarchical caste system. The social status of a member of a 'low' caste is the outcome of his or her own individual karma from previous incarnations.

16.6.2 Individual differences

Differences between individuals are not seen as the outcome of a process of socialisation, but as the consequence of qualities or properties of the 'building material' of the material world (*prakṛti*), of which each person is a part. With regard to personality, this would therefore imply that provision is made for inherent differences with a biological and psychological basis rather than for differences that are attributed to socialisation processes.

Three *basic personality qualities* (*gunas*) are identified, which Sri Aurobindo (1976, cited in Kuppuswamy, 1985:202) describes as 'three qualitative modes of nature which are inextricably intertwined in all cosmic existence'. These three qualities are: mass or inertia (*tamas*), activation, movement and energy (*rajas*), and *sattva* (a concept that is difficult to translate, but which refers to stability, lightness, illumination or enlightenment) (Kalpana, 2012).

Although all three qualities are always present in every thing or person, a particular quality may dominate temporarily, or for a longer period, depending on one's karma. The qualities therefore determine a person's behaviour, and they are manifested in his or her ego functioning. The real self is, however, elevated above these qualities, and the individual is capable of transcending these qualities as determinants of behaviour through the process of self-realisation.

Paranjpe (1988), Kalpana (2012) and Kuppuswamy (1985) indicate that the *Bhagavad-Gita* divides individuals into **three personality types** on the basis of the dominant quality.

- **A person dominated by *tamas*** (the material quality) is described as self-centered, unbalanced, vulgar, stubborn, deceitful, hostile, sluggish, depressed and revengeful. The positive manifestation is a willingness to work hard.
- **A person dominated by *rajas*** (the active quality) is greedy, aggressive, passionate, emotionally labile, and seesaws easily from joy to sorrow. The positive manifestation is enthusiasm, interest and activity.
- **A person dominated by *sattva*** (the spiritual quality) is non-egoistic, uninvolved in the mundane, untouched by success or failure, and full of enthusiasm and resolve. The positive manifestation is an inherent desire to

be good and caring, with a clear understanding of the difference between desirable and undesirable. The negative manifestation is that it binds a person through attachment to happiness and knowledge.

Paranjpe (1988) likens the Eastern approach to individual differences to the typologies of Freud and Jung. He believes, further, that it would, in principle, be empirically testable if the necessary psychometric tests were developed.

Self-evaluation questions

- Discuss the Vedanta's *law of karma* and point out the implications of this law concerning human functioning, individual differences and personality types.
- What, in your opinion, are the implications of the law of karma for *self-responsibility*, which is such a treasured personality characteristic in western society?
- Compare the Vedantic personality types with those of Jung, noting the differences and similarities.

16.7 The development of the personality

Does Vedanta pay any attention to the development and socialisation of the person (personality) in the phenomenal world or is the main focus just on the self-realisation in the attainment of the real self?

Vedanta has little to say about the development of the personality ('I' or 'ego') as representing the temporary, changing *jiva*. Attention is given, instead, to developmental stages in the life cycle that are important for realising the permanent, unchanging real self (*Atman*). In contrast with Freud's psychosexual or Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, Vedanta's stages of development would be better described as *psycho-religious stages*, called *ashramas*.

According to Kakar (2002), the early years of development are regulated by one's past karma, while the formal stages (*ashramas*) begin in late childhood. Four such stages (*ashrama*) are identified.

- The **student** (preparation) – the goal of this stage is the learning of the **dharmā**, (i.e., righteous way of living or duties appropriate for one's station in life) which includes ethical standards and social obligations as guides of living.
- The **householder** (production) – a person marries and start an occupation with the goal of worldly prosperity and the social responsibility (*dharma*) relating to family and work.
- The **hermit** – this is the stage of semi-retirement as a preparation for taking leave of worldly interests and where the social responsibility (*dharma*) expands to include others beyond the close family and community.
- The **wandering ascetic** stage (or pursuit of salvation) – this is the final stage of complete renunciation of worldly matters and full dedication to realisation of the real self. (Hinduism, 2015; Kakar, 2002).

Vedanta does not, therefore, pay much attention to the socialisation process since this has utility only for the *jiva*, and none for self-realisation. However, attention is lavished on methods and techniques for attaining the final stage of total renunciation of ego functioning and worldly interests through transcognitive experiences. (See the Enrichment on the Vedantic method for self-realisation).

16.8 Optimal functioning

How is the optimally functioning person seen, according to Vedanta?

For Vedanta, optimal functioning is seen in the self-realised individual who experiences his or her real self or *Atman*, and who does not accept the ‘I’ or ego of the *jiva* as the real self. It is a person who reached the ‘wandering stage of the ascetic’ as the last developmental stage (*ashrama*). An optimally functioning person rejects the avoidance of suffering which, according to Vedanta, lies in the striving for wealth, power and fame; and this striving originates in the desires and wishes of the ego of *jiva*. The optimally functioning person is in a state of peace, harmony and tranquillity because he or she experiences the real self.

This view of self-realisation is therefore in direct opposition to the meaning attached to the concept by the ego psychologists, or by Rogers and Maslow. According to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the self-realised person is someone whose behaviour is no longer directed or determined by egoistic desires, the self or personal ambition or projects. He or she has stripped away his or her ego and the ‘sense of mineness’, since it is only someone who is released from egoistic desires and longings who is in a position to achieve complete peace and tranquillity.

Paranjpe (1988:209) expresses this as follows:

Through relentless cognitive deconstruction, the ego of such a person is rendered powerless to the point of its virtual destruction. Through this process, the self-realized person uncovers the real self, which – as noted – is claimed to be blissful by nature.

Paranjpe (1984) describes a person who has uncovered the real self as someone who is no longer touched by ordinary delights or sorrows. Such a person does not become angry, afraid or confused. He or she does not pursue personal gain and is not afraid of losing any possessions. Because such a person has empathy for the entire cosmos, he or she no longer has strong ties with a family, institution or particular group. The interests of such a person centre upon the well-being of humanity and therefore make no distinction between friend and foe. Coan (1977) points out that, in the Vedantic approach, it is not the hero or the artist who characteristically portrays optimal functioning, but the holy person or the philosopher.

Self-evaluation question

- In what respects does Vedanta’s view of self-realisation differ from the views of Rogers and Maslow?

16.9 The Vedantic method for self-realisation and psychotherapy

Are there any differences or similarities between the Vedantic method of self-realisation and Western-style psychotherapy?

The Vedantic method for self-realisation (see the Enrichment on the Vedantic method of self-realisation) has certain correspondences with Western psychotherapy, and the role of the guru does include certain Western psychotherapeutic functions. There are, however, a number of clear differences.

Paranjpe (1988) points out that the Vedantic method of self-realisation flows from a religious, philosophical and psychological tradition that centres upon a demanding self-help programme aimed at wholly transforming the individual's life in order to find complete fulfilment. Psychotherapy derives from a medical and psychological tradition whose focus is a healing process aimed at enabling neurotic and psychotic patients to achieve a better adaptation. Psychotherapy is not, therefore, a matter of radically transforming the individual.

Although, from the point of view of Western clinical psychology, the Vedantic method is regarded as a kind of moralism rather than as therapy, Paranjpe maintains that the virtues that have to be cultivated are not goals as such, but aids for getting to know the real self. The process of self-development in the Vedantic tradition starts with acknowledging one's own weaknesses and imperfection. It then moves forward towards self-realisation through the cultivation of certain virtues and continuous self-reflection. The ultimate goal is therefore not virtue itself, but moving from 'ignorance to enlightenment' (Paranjpe, 1988:206).

According to Paranjpe (1984:321), the role of the guru cannot be compared with that of the psychotherapist even though, like a psychotherapist, the guru helps change a person's life from a less satisfying to a more satisfying state. A guru is not a priest, a doctor or a therapist – a guru is a teacher, a guide or helmsman chosen by a person who seeks spiritual (note: not religious) growth. There is no contract or financial agreement between a person and his or her guru as there is between a client or patient and a psychotherapist. Unlike clients or patients in relation to a psychotherapist, individuals give themselves over wholly to their guru, whose instructions and guidance they must totally accept in the process of self-reflection. This kind of direct leading would be completely unacceptable in a Western therapeutic context, especially in the Rogerian tradition, and would be regarded as downright authoritarian.

The application of Western psychotherapy with its primary focus on individual behaviour and dynamic models based on individual ego structures becomes problematic within the Eastern collectivistic context, according to Chadda and Sinha Deb (2013). In contrast to Western society's emphasis on individualism, ego-

development and self-actualisation, the Eastern society is based on collectivism with the importance to promote interdependence and co-operation. According to Chadda and Sinha Deb (2013), this implies that there are fundamental cultural differences in defining the meaning of constructs such as self and others. In the Eastern collectivist society, the self is defined in relation to others, emphasising belonging, dependency and reciprocity opposed to personal autonomy, independence, self-reliance, personal achievement, space and privacy prevalent in Western society. In reviewing the role of privacy and confidentiality in psychotherapy, Neki (1992) stresses the fact that concepts such as privacy and confidentiality do not exist in an Eastern socio-cultural setting and that privacy can isolate an individual in a collectivist society in which interdependence is of great importance. Because of the strong collectivistic nature of the Eastern/Indian society, Chadda and Sinha Deb (2013) are of the opinion that family therapy and the involvement of the family would be the most effective psychotherapeutic intervention in the treatment and management of people with mental problems and disorders.

Janetius (2011a), an Indian psychologist trained in Western psychology, on the other hand, is critical about psychologists who integrate cultural-specific techniques (such as yoga) as part of the therapeutic process, because according to him there are no accurate therapy reports or proper evaluation of the therapeutic outcome, which make it difficult to determine what contributes to the therapeutic success or failure.

Self-evaluation questions

- Describe the most important differences between psychotherapy and the Vedantic method of self-realisation.
- What are the prerequisites for self-realisation, according to Vedanta?

16.10 Evaluation of the perspective

Paranjpe (1988) believes that Vedanta, as an ancient Eastern system of thought, creates a conceptual model of human functioning that is neither more comprehensive nor more limited than most modern personality theories. It proffers central assumptions that can be verified by means of subjective experience, a typology that can be empirically verified, and a practical method for improving the overall state of being human through focusing exclusively on freedom from suffering through self-realisation.

However, in comparison with most personality theories, this approach is limited since it pays no attention to daily human functioning, pathological conditions or aspects of human socialisation. It could also be criticised as being too idealistic an approach because not everyone can attain self-realisation. This approach also contains a strongly paradoxical element with the law of karma, giving it a deterministic bent on the one hand, while on the other hand the individual

co-creates the law of karma and is thus, to a large extent, responsible for his or her salvation. The approach therefore places a high premium not only on self-realisation, but also on self-responsibility – aspects which, in an amended form, we also find in the Jungian and person-oriented approaches.

Janetius (2011b), a practising Indian psychologist trained in Western psychology and therapeutic techniques, is critical about the implementation of traditional and cultural-specific ideas in an attempt to establish an indigenous Indian/Eastern psychology. He states:

The problem with many scholars who exert efforts in defining Indian Psychology today is that they magnify mystical, mythological and *puranic* cosmological thought and the assorted religio-philosophical systems as glorified psychological thinking rather than giving practical pragmatic principles and comprehensive theories of human behaviour in accordance with the emerging worldview in the changing society. Therefore, Indian psychology today remains primitive, intuitive and an unscientific thought pattern of bundled subjective assumptions eluding empirical investigation.

Self-evaluation question

- Why do you think so many Western people are attracted to the Vedanta method of self-realisation?
- What, in your opinion, is the contribution of the Vedanta perspective to personology?

Personality according to Abhidhamma

16.11 Background

What is Buddhism and, more specifically, Abhidhamma Buddhism and Buddhist psychology?

KEY TERM

Buddhism: philosophical, religious and psychological insights of Gautama the Buddha

Buddhism has its sources in the philosophical, religious and psychological insights of Gautama the Buddha (563–483 BC). Buddha means ‘awakened one’. These insights were later interpreted and came to form the various branches of theoretical and practical Buddhism. *Abhidhamma* (which means the ‘ultimate teaching or truth’) is a systematisation of the *suttas* and a part of the Buddhist writings that focuses specifically on psychological aspects of being human. Central to this focus is the concept of *hamma*, which refers to internalised behaviour as manifested in specific states or processes of consciousness.

Central to the Abhidhamma, therefore, are the ethical tenets of inner states of consciousness or behaviour, based on underlying psychological principles. Mikulas (2007) states that Buddhism is not a religion or a philosophy, because the Buddha community was more educational than religious. De Silva (2000) also remarks that

more attention is given to psychology in Buddhism than in any other major spiritual discipline. This is why Rao (1988:125) typifies Buddhist approaches to human functioning as ‘a psychology applied to ethics’ and Aich (2013:165) describes Buddhist teachings as ‘detailed introspective phenomenological psychology’.

Buddhism can, therefore, from a psychological point of view rather be described as a phenomenological description of different states of consciousness than a personality theory. Rao (1988:123–124) defines **Buddhist psychology** as follows:

KEY TERM

Buddhist psychology: a theory of the nature and states of consciousness from the mundane and sensuous to the supreme and sublime

Buddhist psychology is a theory of the nature and states of consciousness from the mundane and sensuous to the supreme and sublime, and it is a method of achieving the transformation of man from *samsara* to *nirvana*, from sensuality to transcendence.

Western psychologists such as Carl Jung (Suzuki and Jung, 1948) and Erich Fromm showed a great interest in Buddhism. Fromm, Suzuki & Martino (1960) hailed Buddhism as the ‘art of seeing the true nature’ of a person’s being, and it paves the way from ‘bondage to freedom’, liberating the natural energies of a person.

Enrichment

Buddhism and Western psychology

Conjunctive psychology: Conjunctive psychology, of which Mikulas (2002) is the founder, is the integration of Buddhism and Western psychology (mostly Ken Wilber’s Integral psychology), which involves the merging of western psychological principles with Eastern health traditions. Mikulas (2007) gives a Western psychological interpretation of the fundamentals of Buddhist thought, based on the premise that essential Buddhism is not a religion or philosophy, but rather a psychology. He provides a short history of Buddhism and the stance of Buddhism in America and Europe. After relating the essential Buddhist teachings to Western schools of thought, such as the Cognitive sciences, Behaviour modification, Psychoanalysis and Transpersonal psychology, he gives an exposition of Conjunctive psychology.

Contemplative psychology: Contemplative psychology is an alternative approach to psychotherapy, incorporating Buddhist teachings and Western psychology. It was developed at Naropa University in 1970 by a Buddhist monk, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, and members of the Psychology Department applying meditation and spiritual therapy in combination with psychoanalysis. It was established in the West as a discipline at the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam by Han de Wit, after he coined the name in his pioneering book, *Contemplative Psychology* (1991). Contemplative psychology is a study of a way of life, by obtaining knowledge about living in the Buddhist ‘first person’s sense of being wise and free from confusion and ignorance’, through methods such as meditation, contemplation and prayers (awareness strategies).

Self-evaluation question

- Describe Buddhist psychology.

16.12 The worldview and view of the person underlying the perspective

Does the Buddhist worldview and view of the person differ greatly from the view of Vedanta?



A portrayal of the Buddha image
Source: Steve Martin Photography. Fotolia

KEY TERMS

dharma: the 'cosmic law of order' or principle law that orders the universe

dharma: duties, rights, conduct and virtues in sustaining a 'righteous way of living' and a positive order

Anatta: no-self

The Buddha's views are the outcome of an empirical approach based on direct extrospective and introspective observation. He is opposed to any metaphysical speculations that do not revolve around the basic problems of being human and the resolution of these problems. His chief purpose is to find an answer to human suffering (*pali/dukkha*), which he identifies as a person's central problem.

In contrast with Vedanta, where the key issue is acknowledging and realising the real self, Buddha acknowledges no self at all – just a stream of states of consciousness that change continuously and are constantly in motion. Buddhism believes that everything

in the empirical world is only a 'stream of passing **Dharma**' (Buddhist meaning of the word, referring to the 'cosmic law of order' and principles that orders the universe), characterised as **Anatta**: i.e., no-self or being without a persisting self or independent existence (Von Glasenapp, 1995). In Buddhism the self is merely an illusion, a 'no-thing' which can be identified as the self, and there exists no duality of a subject and an object; in contrast, Vedanta acknowledges *Atman*, the real self, as part of *Brahman* which encompasses everything by transcending the subject-object duality (Loy, 2016a). According to Aich (2013), the primary concern of Buddhism is to understand the nature of experience (consciousness), and as such the focus is conscious reality as an ever changing reality.

For the Buddha there is no stable, unchanging identity or reality. The Buddha comes to the conclusion that all the suffering of daily existence arises from the illusion of the permanence of an ego or I-identity. All suffering springs from the fact that people become frozen into a constant I-identity or that reality becomes static. The solution to the problem of suffering is to overcome all that traps humans in an ego or I-identity, thereby achieving the *state of consciousness of nirvana* – a state of constant movement and change, free from all references to an ego or an I.

Paranjpe, Ho and Rieber (1988:33) point out that the difference between Vedanta and Buddhism with regard to the acknowledgement of a self lies in two different views of ultimate human destiny. They describe these as follows:

Their assertions are based on two rival claims (i.e. final goals): emptiness at the center of experience claimed by the Buddhists; fullness of bliss at the center of awareness affirmed by the Vedantists.

Von Glasenapp (1995) also maintains that the doctrines of Vedanta and Buddhism exclude one another, because in Vedanta the ultimate aim is to ‘penetrate into the last reality’, the ‘immortal essence’ or core within a person from which everything originates. Buddhism, on the other hand, wishes to completely abandon all corporality, sensations, perceptions, volitions and acts of consciousness in realising the state of bliss.

Loy (2016b) typifies the relation between Buddhism and Vedanta as ‘quite curious’ because apart from totally different worldviews there seems to be a great unresolved ontological correspondence. He argues as follows:

Their worldviews are very different – in fact too different, because they seem to be mirror images of each other: no-self (anatta) vs all-Self (atman=Brahman), conditionality vs Unconditioned, impermanence vs. the Immutable, and so forth. Given their common denial of any ontological duality between self and other, one wonders whether their opposed conceptual systems might actually be different attempts to describe the same non-dual experience. If Brahman has no characteristics of its own, and sunyata has no characteristics of its own, then what distinguishes pure Being from pure non-being?

Self-evaluation question

- Describe the most important differences between the Vedantic and Buddhistic worldview and view of the person.

16.13 The structure of the personality

In light of the Buddhist view of the person not acknowledging the existence of a self, is it at all valid to ask a question about the structural components of the self/personality?

KEY TERM

atta: a person's identity

The Buddhist concept **atta**, which is a broad reference to a person's identity, comes closest to the concept of personality in Western psychology and resembles the Western concept of ‘soul’ or ‘Self’ rather than ‘I’, ‘oneself’ or ‘myself’ (Fronsdal, 2002). Bear in mind, however, that one of the basic premises of Abhidhamma is that there is no fixed self in the sense of the Western view of a fixed I-identity or ego. Therefore, the core concepts in Buddhism is *anatta*, no-self, and *atta* (as a departure from Vedanta *Atman*) which is composed of dynamic, transient states of consciousness. The illusion of a ‘self’ is created by combining the parts of the body, thoughts, sensations, desires, memories, and so on. These processes are, however, all changeable and ephemeral. The only real continuity is *bhava* – it is a state of becoming, which implies constant change and the continuity of consciousness over time through life and death. Bhikku (1999) states that *bhava* is both a psychological and cosmological concept meaning a sense of identity during a particular world experience; an individual's sense of what he or she is while focusing on a particular desire. Each successive moment of consciousness is shaped by the previous one and will, in turn, be shaped by the next. It is *bhava* that connects one moment of consciousness with the next and creates the idea of constancy. Human personality is therefore like a river that has a constant form, which creates the illusion of a unique identity, but in reality its content is constantly changing and not one of the

KEY TERM

I-as-process: there is no I as a thing at all; I is merely a name for a process

drops of water in the river is the same as it was a moment earlier. Following this view, there can be no notion of a structure of personality, only of various processes of consciousness experienced by a person. The central issue is, rather, *processes of consciousness* that take place in the person. Crook and Rabgyas (1988) describe the Buddhist view of the **I-as-process** rather than the *I-as-identity*. According to them the 'I' do not exist as a structural thing. The word simply describes a process. When you search for the 'I', you will only find processes and parts of processes and even if you name these, the words still refer to processes and not things.

According to Aung (1929:7), the implication of this view of the I-as-process is that:

... there is no actor apart from action, no percipient apart from perception, no conscious subject behind consciousness.

Because the processes of consciousness seem to be the central issue in Buddhism, how is consciousness perceived from a Buddhist viewpoint?

Consciousness is the central focus of human functioning and as a process it represents the beginning and end of human experience. Rao (1988:126) points out that the original Buddhist writings define consciousness as 'that which thinks of its subject', in other words, consciousness suggests a continuous relationship between a subject and an object, without distinguishing between the subject and the object. Most Western approaches make a clear distinction between subject and object, with the subject (the I or ego) at the centre of all functioning and processes. The Buddhist view holds that consciousness, as process, is the starting point, and the subject (I or ego) owes its existence entirely to the process – a view also to be found in some of the post-modern theories of human functioning.

Consciousness includes and is influenced by various basic elements. Although 52 elements are identified (Rao, 1988; Rewata Dhamma, 2015), there are seven that are found at all levels of consciousness:

- **Contact** (*phassa*): This is apperception, which occurs when consciousness encounters an object that makes an impact on it.
- **Perception** (*sanna*): This is the sensory perception that arises from all cognitive contents of consciousness.
- **Feeling** (*vedana*): This is the feeling of pleasure or pain that accompanies conscious experience.
- **Volition** (*cetana*): This is an act of will of the consciousness, but in Buddhism volitional activities cannot be isolated from karma as an underlying drive or motive of all behaviour.
- **Individuation or 'one-objectness'** (*ekaggata*): This is focused attention and concentration.
- **Spontaneous attention** (*manasikara*): This is involuntary attention, in other words, attention is attracted by the object.
- **Psychic energy** (*jivitindriya*): This imparts vitality and unifies the other elements.

Rao (1988:136) summarises the operation of the elements as follows:

It would appear that *sanna*, *vedana*, and *cetana* – perception, feeling and volition – refer to the cognitive, the affective and conative aspects of our psychic life. Contact, individuation, attention and psychic energy are the necessary conditions that make the functioning of the psychical processes possible.

KEY TERM

nirvana: a state devoid of all obsession such as desire, hate and illusion; a state of total psychological and metaphysical emptiness

The combining of elements and co-operation between the elements create the different levels of consciousness. Depending on what system is used, Theravada Buddhism identifies between 89 and 121 different states or levels of consciousness (Rewata Dhamma, 2015). The states or levels range from a sensory awareness of objects (*kamaloka*), which remains located in a strong ego-centredness, to a formless level (*lokuttara*) of transperceptual and transpersonal experiences that are located in the infinity of space, the infinity of consciousness and nothingness. The state of **nirvana** is attained by means of transcendental consciousness. Although many similarities are apparent between this approach and Vedanta as regards the attainment of a transcendent state of consciousness, the Vedantic understanding of this state is of a total fulfilment that is experienced through self-realisation, while the Buddhist understanding is of a state of *sunyata* that refers to a state of total psychological and metaphysical emptiness (Rao, 1988).

Self-evaluation questions

- Explain the Buddhist view of 'I-as-process' and indicate how this view differs from the Western perspective of the 'I-as-identity'.
- Compare the depth-psychological conceptualisation of the levels of consciousness with that of Buddhism.

16.14 The dynamics of human functioning

With consciousness being the central focus of Buddhism, how can individual motivation or individual differences be explained from a Buddhist perspective?

As in Vedanta, the dynamic explanation of behaviour cannot be separated from morality in the Buddhist approaches. The different states of consciousness are described as moral, immoral or unmoral – thus the key issue here is a combination of psychology and ethics in the explanation of human functioning. Rao (1988) points out, however, that it is difficult to understand the Buddhist idea of morality because good and evil are not always clearly defined. The description of a state as moral (leading to good, healthy results), immoral (leading to bad, unhealthy results), or unmoral (a morally indeterminate state that is reached at a transcendent level) is determined primarily by karma.

16.14.1 Karma as an agent of motivation

Karma is a word that is often misused in Western literature, usually to refer in a phenomenological sense to the unavoidable consequences of a person's thoughts, words or deeds. Taylor (1988) indicates that Vedanta and Buddhism ascribe their own distinct meanings to the word. Hinduism is based on the belief that karma does not change

one's inner being or self as it cannot be changed; karma simply determines the form one will take on in one's next incarnation. Buddhism, on the other hand, does not believe that there is an unchangeable underlying substantial self that is carried over to the next incarnation; it is only one's karma that is carried over into the next incarnation.

In Buddhism, however, karma is not seen as just the predisposing factor that is responsible for the successive cycles of birth and death, but also as the factor that motivates a person's behaviour at a given moment. The influence of karma and how it determines moral or immoral behaviour is strikingly illustrated in the following quotation from the Abhidhamma doctrine on karma:

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the wagon ... If a man speaks or acts with pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him. (Taken from the Dhammapada, Verse 1 and cited in Hall & Lindzey, 1978:360.)

Enrichment

Universal and psychological meaning of karma

Dhivan Thomas Jones (2014) draws a distinction between the *universal* (traditional Buddhist) meaning of karma and the *psychological* meaning as applied in practice by Western Buddhism.

The *universal* meaning is based on the theory of universal moral justice, implying that all intentional actions of body, speech and mind have consequences in life in general as well as future lives. The *psychological* meaning implies that intentional actions of body, speech and mind have psychological consequences resulting in positive or negative outcomes and experiences affecting present lives (i.e., giving food to hungry people results in positive feelings of well-being, while lying about cheating or stealing creates anxiety).

The *universal* meaning is a matter of religious belief relating to a cosmic justice system and it is tied up with a belief in rebirth. The *psychological* law of karma appeals to a person's intuitive sense of morality and is tested by actual psychological experiences.

Jones (2014) concludes that Western Buddhists are more inclined to adhere to the law of karma in a psychological sense because it is both practical and empirical, and it is therefore compatible with a scientific worldview and can be taught in their psychological teaching.

Abhidhamma distinguishes various perceptual/cognitive and affective factors that can, in conjunction with karma, lead to *healthy* or *unhealthy states of consciousness* (Fronsdal, 2006). (See the Enrichment that follows for some of the most important factors.) For each healthy factor there is an unhealthy factor. So, to attain a healthy state of consciousness the unhealthy factors have to be replaced by healthy factors. Healthy and unhealthy factors inhibit one another; in other words, the presence of a particular factor suppresses the opposite factor. There is not, however, always a one-to-one relationship. In some cases, a single healthy factor can inhibit a number of unhealthy factors, such as non-attachment, which inhibits greed, avarice, jealousy and aversion. However, the presence of a single unhealthy factor, such as

delusion, can mean that not one healthy factor will develop. It is a person's karma that determines whether he or she is predominantly in a healthy or an unhealthy state of consciousness. Apart from specific biological and situational influences, the combination of dominant healthy or unhealthy factors is largely the outcome of the influence of previous states of consciousness – in other words, the outcome of karma. When a factor or group of factors often dominates a person's state of consciousness, this is regarded as a personality trait (Goleman, 1975; Hall & Lindzey, 1978).

Enrichment

Factors that can lead to healthy and unhealthy states of consciousness

(Cornfield, 2008; de Silva, 1976; Goleman, 1975; Hall & Lindzey, 1978)

A distinction can be drawn between cognitive and emotional healthy and unhealthy factors. Among the most important cognitive **unhealthy factors** are delusion (*moha*) and a false view or misapprehension (*ditthi*). Delusion is seen as the fundamental source of unhealthy mental states and can be defined as an 'intoxication of the mind' through which a wrong perception leads to misapprehension (a false view) of an object of awareness. According to Abhidhamma, delusion and a false view underlie a basic ignorance on which all human suffering is founded. The misapprehension of the real nature of things is the core of all unhealthy factors. The misapprehension to which Buddha makes the most explicit reference in his writings is the idea of a fixed 'self' or 'ego'.

The cognitive **healthy factor** to which delusion is opposed is insight (*panna*), which is accompanied by mindfulness (*sati*). Insight is defined as 'a clear perception of an object', while mindfulness refers to the continuous, clear understanding of an object. Insight and mindfulness are the primary factors on which all other healthy factors rest. The presence of these two factors is sufficient to inhibit all other unhealthy factors.

Emotions are generally regarded as the main obstacle in the development of spiritual life; emotions are unhealthy 'roadblocks to be cleared in the battleground between reason and emotion' (De Silva, 1976). Unhealthy emotional factors are symptomatic of possessing and jealously clinging to things; the factors being greed (*lobha*), avarice (*macchhariya*) and jealousy (*issa*). Opposed to this is a group of healthy factors such as non-attachment (*alobha*), impartiality (*tatramajjhata*) and equanimity (*passadhi*), which are all implicated in the serene release from things and the diminishing feelings of attachment. The unhealthy factors of greed, avarice and jealousy, for example, may be the stimulus that drives a person to acquire a larger, more impressive house in a wealthy neighbourhood in order to increase the person's prestige, or the person may be jealous of people who already live in such a neighbourhood. The healthy factors of non-attachment, impartiality and equanimity would prompt the person to consider whether it would be worth experiencing the additional tension and stress of earning more money in order to be able to afford the larger, better house.

Some healthy factors emerge only when certain circumstances call them forth. Thus humility (*hin*), which inhibits shamelessness (*ahirika*), and discretion (*ottappa*), the opposite of remorselessness (*anottappa*), do not emerge until a malicious act, which hurts something or someone, is contemplated or carried out. According to Abhidhamma, when shamelessness and remorselessness are combined with the unhealthy factor of egoism (*mana*) – where the person functions exclusively in terms of his or her own need satisfaction – they form the basis of all human iniquity.

16.14.2 Individual differences

As in Vedanta, individual personality differences are not ascribed to the socialisation process. In Abhidhamma they are the result of the hierarchical structure and strengths of different healthy and unhealthy factors that determine a person's state of consciousness. If a person's consciousness is constantly influenced by the same factor or groups of factors, these are gradually established as the factors that determine his or her personality, motivation and behaviour.

Does Buddhism distinguish between various personality types?

According to Buddhism (Hall & Lindzey, 1978; Miller, 2016), three main *personality types* are distinguished, originating from the Buddhist belief that unhealthy or healthy characteristics develop from three primary roots: (i) *greed* (desire and craving) vs confidence (faith); (ii) *aversion* (hatred and ill will) vs wisdom; (iii) *delusion* (confusion) vs clarity. All individuals possess these three traits and the opposites, and the different personality types can be identified on the basis of the unique combination of traits that dominate. Based on the predominance of unhealthy characteristics embedded in the three primary roots (greed, aversion and delusion), the following three personality types can be distinguished:

- **The sensual type** (greed temperament) is driven by desire, seeking comfort and pleasure. The body movements of this type are supple. These individuals are charming, courteous and invariably well-mannered towards others, seeking harmony and avoiding conflict. They make sure that their beds are always neatly made before they go to sleep, and they make few movements during sleep. They carry out all their tasks thoroughly, carefully, skilfully and with an artistic flair. They prefer soft, sweet, well-cooked food, and they eat slowly, savouring each taste. They are inclined to value beautiful things and are usually attracted by excellence, not seeing faults or defects. The negative attributes of people of this type are that they may often be self-centred, jealous, pretentious, vain, deceitful, mercenary, discontented, lascivious, pleasure-seeking and overindulgent.
- **The malicious type** (aversive temperament) is characterised by judgement, hatred, ill will and rejection. These individuals move stiffly and their intercourse with others is sullen. They do not make their beds neatly, and when they sleep their bodies are tense. They are usually cross and unfriendly when they are wakened. They are not neat and exact in their work. They prefer strongly spiced food, and they eat quickly without really noticing the taste. They dislike food with a piquant, delicate taste. They are not interested in beautiful things, and spot faults quickly. They are often malicious, ungrateful, jealous and mean.
- **The deluded type** (deluded temperament) is lost in uncertainty and confusion. The body movements of this type are clumsy and untidy. These people do not tidy their beds, and they thrash around in their sleep. They wake up slowly and complain loudly once they are awake. As workers they

are untidy, inaccurate and inept. They do not care much about what they eat, as long as they receive food. They are messy eaters and take huge, greedy mouthfuls of food. They have no appreciation of their own for whether things are beautiful or ugly and believe what other people tell them. They display a general sluggishness and stiffness, they are easily distracted and seem confused. They may sometimes be ruthless, stubborn and tenacious and their being is characterised by doubt, negligence, ignorance and anxiety.

Abhidhamma specifies the optimal states that can be attained for each of the different personality types when they start with meditation. In teaching meditation, each personality type requires a particular environment to suit that person's personal disposition. The first step is to counteract the dominant psychological tendencies in order to bring about a balance in the consciousness. The surroundings of a sensual person would, for example, have to be dirty, uncomfortable and dilapidated, while those of the malicious and deluded types would have to be clean, comfortable and tidy. In each case, the surroundings should inhibit the dominant personality trait.

Activity

The 3 Buddhist personality types: Which one are you?

Elana Miller (2016) provides a short questionnaire, developed by Amita Schmidt, to establish your Buddhist personality type. Go to www.huffingtonpost.com/elana...md/personality-types_b_4125852.html and after answering the questions and establishing your personality type, determine according to Miller's guidelines the unique strengths and challenges of your specific temperament and personality style.

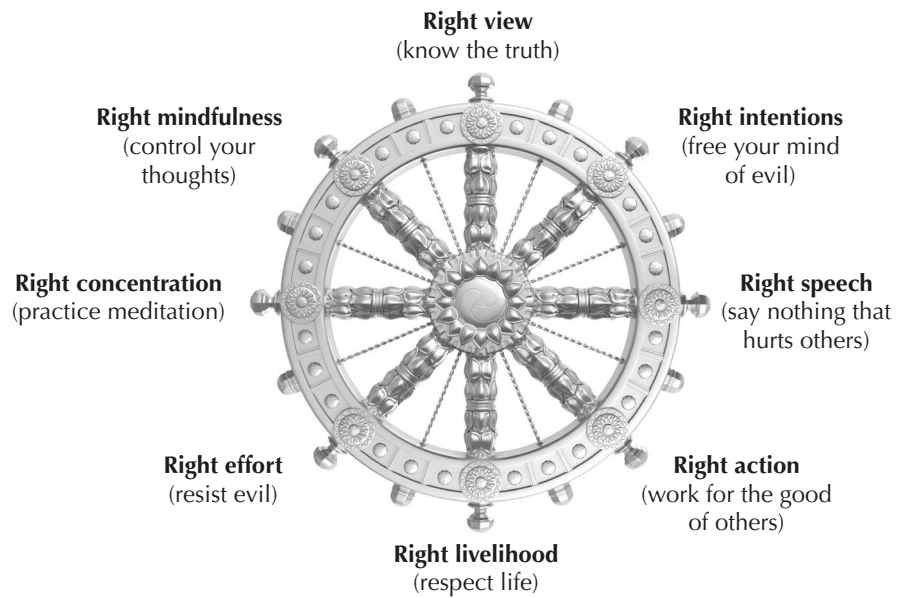
Self-evaluation questions

- Compare the Vedanta and Buddhist views of karma as a motivating agent in human functioning.
- Discuss the Buddhist view of the role of healthy and unhealthy factors in the development of individual differences and optimal functioning.

16.15 The development of the personality

Buddhism distinguishes between different personality types, but does it explain the development of the various types?

Like Vedanta, Abhidhamma does not provide a detailed description of the development of the personality. One reason for not giving detailed attention to specific life phases is that the entire lifespan is seen as transformations of states of consciousness on the path towards nirvana, rather than different stages in the human personality. According to the Buddhist Concept of Personality (2013), the gradual development of personality follows the *Eight-fold path*, through the practice of *panna* (wisdom), *sila* (morality) and *samadhi* (concentration) to accomplish a state of perfect enlightenment and full humanness.



Eight-fold path of Buddhism
Source: GeorgSV – Fotolia

Enrichment

The noble eight-fold path: The way to end all suffering

Nirvana as a state of perfect enlightenment and full humanness can be reached by following the *Eight-fold path*, as a means and way to end all suffering. According to Bhikku Bodhi (1999), Buddhist Concept of Personality (2013) and Purkayastha (2011), the Eight-fold path entails the following:

Right view (perfect vision) – the ‘right view or vision’ is the first of the two paths of wisdom, and it implies the understanding of the non-lasting and imperfect nature of the objective world as an illusionary reality.

Right intention (perfect emotions or aspirations) – this is the second of the two paths of wisdom and it means liberating emotional intelligence and desire. Buddhism distinguishes three types of intentions: (i) intention of renunciation, meaning to resist and renounce desire; (ii) intention of good will, meaning to avoid all forms of aversion and anger; (iii) intention of harmlessness, meaning the nurturing of compassion in the avoidance of cruel or violent acts.

Right speech (perfect communication) – this is the first of the three paths of moral discipline based on ethical conduct. It implies warm, clear, truthful and non-harmful communication toward others, and the avoidance of lies, being deceitful or hurtful to others.

Right action (integral action) – this is the second of the three paths of moral discipline based on ethical conduct and non-exploitation of others and oneself. It involves correct physical actions, which implies respect for the belongings of others; also actions that will not cause any harm such as sexual misconduct, cheating or fraud.

Right livelihood (correct action) – this is the third of the three paths of moral discipline based on ethical conduct and non-exploitation of others and oneself. It implies a righteous way of living in which wealth and prosperity is obtained in an honest and legal way; and a way of life without alcohol, intoxicant products and the slaughtering of animals.

(continued)

Right effort (full effort of energy and vitality) – this is the first of the three paths of mental development, which implies a conscious effort to direct life energy into a transformative path of creative action that fosters wholeness. Mental energy is the force behind the ‘right effort’, which can result in healthy states of consciousness (i.e., self-discipline, honest, benevolent and kind) or unhealthy states of consciousness (i.e., desire, aggression, envy and violence).

Right mindfulness (*samma sati*: complete awareness) – this is the second of the three paths of mental development, which implies the right mindfulness of oneself, feelings, thoughts of people, things and reality. Controlled by cognition, it is the ‘mental ability to control the repulsive nature’ of a person.

Right concentration (*samma samadhi*: full integral concentration through meditation) – this is the last of the three paths of mental development, and the last path in the attainment of enlightenment by means of concentration meditation.

Personality development in Buddhism, according to Purkayastha (2011), is signified by improving internal and external characteristics of an individual. Buddhism places emphasis on the improvement of internal characteristics in order to ultimately attain perfect enlightenment and nirvana. This state can only be reached through self-control, meditation and selflessness.

Development of the personality could thus be seen as phases in an unending chain of reincarnations/transformations of consciousness. Just as each moment of consciousness is important for the next, and builds upon the previous moment of consciousness, so each life is important for the next life and is influenced by the previous life. For Buddhism, a person’s state of consciousness at death is of the utmost importance because it is a vital determinant of his or her psychological status at a subsequent birth.

Self-evaluation question

- Compare the Buddhist view of development to the Vedantic view of development.

16.16 Optimal development

What are the characteristics of an optimally functioning person and how is this state attained, according to the Buddhist viewpoint?

KEY TERM

arahat: an ideal type representing the final point of a gradual process of development

According to Theravada Buddhism, optimal development is attained by an **arahat** (a person who is worthy of praise or a saint), who is stripped of unhealthy factors because he or she has, through meditation, progressed to nirvana many times. Rao (1988:137) describes nirvana (*nibbana*) as a state:

... devoid of all obsession such as desire, hate, and illusion, the knowledge attained is perfect and undistorted. Subjectively, it is an experience of unity, completeness, and timelessness. In the state of nibbana, there is freedom from all suffering and attachment. From an emotional point of view, nibbana is happiness, peace, calm, contentment, and compassion.

The most important aspect of nirvana is not just the attainment of the state itself, but the irreversible change that it brings about in the post-nirvana personality. A person’s first experience of nirvana is generally the start of a process in which

unhealthy factors are progressively replaced by healthy factors. As the person attains nirvana again and again, unhealthy factors are increasingly inhibited until eventually they no longer exist in his or her state of consciousness. Although the *arahat* is an ideal type and represents the final point of a gradual process of development, the process can be undertaken by any person in an attempt to excise unhealthy factors from his or her consciousness. Thus in Abhidhamma, the *arahat* represents not only optimal development but also optimal psychological health.

The *arahat* is someone whose sensual appetites (i.e., greed for sensual desire) are inhibited. He or she displays no anxiety, resentments, fears, aversions or feelings of anger. There is no need for approval or praise from others and the person accepts loss, damage, pain and blame. They do not cling to a dogmatic belief that this or that is the 'truth'. Such people are impartial in their dealings with other people. They show empathy, compassion and openness towards others' needs in all circumstances. The *arahat* is alert and observes accurately, and this is accompanied by a calm delight in experience that is undisturbed no matter how stimulating or boring the circumstances may be (Goleman, 1975; Rao, 1988).

Although from a Western perspective, the *arahat* has more in common with the saint than with ordinary people, Hall and Lindzey (1978) maintain that the *arahat* personality type does, in fact, share certain characteristics with the fully actualised personalities of Maslow and Rogers.

Self-evaluation question

- Describe the optimal functioning person according to the Buddhist view and compare it with the views of Maslow, Rogers and Jung.

16.17 Views on psychopathology

With the distinction between healthy and unhealthy factors in mind, how does Buddhism perceive pathological behaviour?

Abhidhamma has a fairly simple view of psychopathology in that it is regarded as the presence of unhealthy factors in the consciousness and the absence of healthy factors. Each pathology exists through the domination of a particular unhealthy factor in the consciousness. Thus, for example, delusion is seen as the fundamental source of unhealthy mental states; and egoism is basic to all self-centred activities, which in Western psychology would be classified as antisocial behaviour, while agitation and worry lie at the core of neurosis (Goleman, 1975).

The normal person has a mixture of healthy and unhealthy factors in the consciousness which alternate with one another without any one factor dominating. The ultimate goal of the individual's psychological development is, however, to gradually eliminate the unhealthy factors so that only the healthy factors remain. For most people, this is an unattainable ideal.

Anusayas is one reason cited to explain why so few people attain the ideal state of psychological health. This is a latent tendency of consciousness to be attracted by unhealthy factors. *Anusayas* lies slumbering and latent in the person's consciousness, waiting for the right moment to arrive. The principle of *anusayas* is the closest that Abhidhamma comes to the Western concept of the unconscious. There are, in particular, seven latent unhealthy factors that are strongly indicative of *anusayas*: greed/sensual lust; aversion/grudge; speculative opinion/false view; sceptical doubt; pride and conceit; craving for continual existence; and ignorance (Piya Tan, 2010).

By means of meditation (see the Enrichment that follows on the Buddhist methods of meditation), however, the committed Buddhist follows a coordinated programme of control over the impact of the environment, behaviour, *anusayas* and states of consciousness in order to reach a plateau of healthy states.

Self-evaluation question

- How does the Buddhist view of psychopathology differ from the Western perspective?

Enrichment

Buddhist methods of meditation

There are different forms of meditation, developed by different religious and spiritual traditions. In many forms, meditation is primarily the withdrawal of attention from the outside world, and the relinquishment of customary patterns of observation, as well as of cognitive, emotional and motor activities. There are also forms that use music, movement, or visual and auditory contemplation of physical objects (for example, gazing at the flame of a candle or listening to the rippling of running water) as a means of redirecting the stream of consciousness. Two categories of Buddhist meditation which play distinctive roles in meditation can be distinguished, namely: *concentration meditation* (*samatha*) and *insight meditation* (*vipassana*).

Concentration meditation can be described as a tool building the power of the mind, and insight meditation as a way to direct and focus the power (Goleman, 1976, 2009; Gunaratana, 2016).

- **Concentration meditation.** The first category comprises concentration methods, whereby the consciousness is concentrated on a single object and the meditator tries to banish all other impressions from the consciousness. This is an extension of *ekaggata* or 'one-pointedness', an element of the consciousness whereby ordinary functioning of the consciousness is suppressed and attention is narrowed, through concentration, to a single point until the mind enters a deep, trancelike stillness. If the meditator succeeds in attaining complete *ekaggata*, so that there is no fluctuation in the concentration of the consciousness, he or she achieves the state of *jhana*. This is a state of bliss in which normal perception and thoughts no longer exist and the person becomes one with the object on which he or she is concentrating. There are seven levels of *jhana*. Each level represents a more intense concentration, a stronger feeling of bliss and an after-effect through which unhealthy factors are inhibited. However, as the effect of *jhana* weakens, unhealthy factors can once again emerge and further meditation has to take place.



Concentration meditation builds the power of the mind
Source: zinkevych – Fotolia



Insight meditation directs and focuses the power of the mind
Source: SolisImages – Fotolia

- **Insight meditation.** In the second method, insight meditation (*vipassana*), the purpose is to obtain full awareness of one's experience through insight into psychological functioning and instruction in attention or mindfulness (*sati*). This method cuts through conventional perception to perceive mind and matter as they actually are. Staying in the here and now, it rests on the element of consciousness of spontaneous attention (*manasikara*), in which there is a spontaneous, uncensored flow of the contents of consciousness. Attention is focused on emotions, thoughts and sensations exactly as they rise to the surface of the consciousness, without any elaboration, preference, selection, commentary, censorship, judgement or interpretation.

Bogart (1991:384) sees this as

... a process of expanding attention to as many mental and physical events as possible, the goal of which is understanding of the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-substantial nature of the phenomena.

At first it is extremely difficult, in insight meditation, to break the habit of concentrating on a single thought or emotion, and to remain attentive to all impulses without concentrating on a single impulse. If the person's attentiveness succeeds, he or she achieves insight (*vipassana*) into the functioning of the consciousness as a constant flow and combination of impulses. The ultimate, ideal state is *nirvana*, in which the awareness of all impulses ceases and the person experiences a state of nothingness and complete bliss and equanimity.

Meditation and scientific research

Research has shown that the two types of meditation have different effects on the brain activities of practitioners. Some of the first electro-encephalographic (EEG) studies undertaken by Ananda, China and Singh (1961), Kasamatsu and Hirai (1969) and Hirai (1974), showed that people who practised concentration meditation and had attained the state of *jhana* in Abhidhamma did not respond at all to external stimuli such as flickering lights, loud noise or the touch of a hot test-tube. By contrast, those who practised insight meditation, which is accompanied by heightened attentiveness, did register the external stimuli.

However, after reviewing the stance of later neuroscientific observations of the effects of meditation on brain functions, Austin (1998) comes to the conclusion that most EEG studies of meditation are open to criticism. Arnon (2016) and Shin (2016) provide further overviews of research of the physiological (brain, metabolism, respiration, central and autonomous nervous system, endocrine system, etc.) and psychological (cognition and emotions) effects of meditation.

Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) Meditation Bibliography

This Institute provides the most comprehensive and updated catalogue of published scientific studies on meditation. The IONS Meditation Bibliography was compiled and edited by Michael Murphy and Steven Donovan and first published in 1997 with an introduction by Eugene Taylor as *The Physical and Psychological Effects of Meditation: A Review of Contemporary Research*. It has since been updated and is now available as a searchable, online catalogue with citations, abstracts and, when available, full text articles – all free of charge.

16.18 Meditation and psychotherapy

What are the similarities and differences between meditation and psychotherapy?

Although the use of meditation in psychotherapy is the focus of intense interest in the West, there are important differences in goals that make meditation a complement to psychotherapy rather than a substitute for it.

Welwood (1980) describes the goals of psychotherapy as ‘self-integration’, while the goal of meditation is ‘self-transcendence’. He indicates, too, that each focuses on different aspects of consciousness. In some therapies, the main issue is to make what is unconscious conscious through analysis, exploration and interpretation, whereas in concentration meditation the purpose is, precisely, to reach a pure state of consciousness without content. While insight meditation appears to use exploration and analysis, no meaning or specific interpretation is given to the contents.

Deikman (1982) points out, as well, that Western therapy focuses on the content of the consciousness – emotions, thoughts, memories, impulses, images and the self-concept – while meditation is directed at consciousness itself and not on the content of consciousness. Therapy aims to relieve symptoms that have a negative influence on the person’s functioning in work, intimate relationships or general lifestyle. It aims to teach the individual strategies for leading a fuller, more effective life and to satisfy personal needs more successfully. The aim of meditation is to accept reality as it is, but to reduce the individual’s involvement and obsession with it.

Craven (1989), Deikman (1982) and Kutz, Borysenko and Benson (1985) all maintain that psychotherapy can be complemented by meditation despite these differences, but that therapy cannot be replaced by meditation. Snaith (1998) surveyed forms of psychotherapy in which meditation plays a role (i.e. induction of a trance state and autogenic training), establishing positive outcomes as far as anxiety reduction is concerned. He also found that participation in meditation creates a realisation of playing a role in the improvement of the condition.

There are, however, those such as Bradwejn, Dowdall and Iny (1985) who maintain that psychotherapy and meditation are incompatible. The reason they give is that the aim of meditation (stripping away the ego) is incompatible with most Western therapies in which the purpose is, specifically, to strengthen and develop ego functioning.

Bogart (1991:398–399) points out that meditation is effective only with people who have reached a certain level of personality integration, and that it can have a damaging effect on people with personality disturbances:

... Buddhist meditation practice will only be effective when the practitioner has a relatively intact, coherent, and integrated sense of self, without which there is danger that feelings of emptiness or not feeling inwardly cohesive or integrated may be mistaken for *sunyata* (voidness) or selflessness.

In other words, there first has to be an ego – preferably an integrated ego – before that ego can be transcended by means of meditation. Because meditation can only be effective with individuals who have reached a reasonable level of personality integration, Bogart (1991) asserts that it is totally unsuitable for use with people who are on the verge of becoming autistic, psychopathic, schizophrenic or neurotic. If a reasonable level of personality integration is not established through therapy in such cases, meditation would not be advisable because the feelings of emptiness and nothingness of nirvana would not be distinguishable from the pathological experience of emptiness and nothingness. Meditation may even be dangerous, and could lead to further disintegration of the personality. After discussing the relevance of Buddha and meditation for existential therapy, Boeree (1997) also points out that without wisdom and morality, meditation is worthless, and even dangerous.

Self-evaluation question

- Provide a critical discussion of the following statements: ‘Under certain circumstances meditation can be employed as a complement to rather than a substitute for psychotherapy’ and ‘Meditation may even be dangerous’.

16.19 Evaluation of the perspective

Although many aspects of the Buddhist approach are of a metaphysical nature, Rao (1988) believes that a number of the postulates are no more far-fetched or mysterious than Freud’s concept of the unconscious or Jung’s concept of archetypes. Just as the unconscious and the archetypes represent levels of consciousness, so the transcendental states of consciousness (*jhanas*) also represent levels of consciousness, although the ideal of transcendence is a state of nothingness.

Hall and Lindzey (1978) express reservations as to the general validity and reliability of Buddhist views for personology. In consequence of its emphasis on consciousness and the transcendent levels of consciousness, they classify Abhidhamma as a *phenomenology of states of consciousness*. Only someone who has undergone the required instruction in meditation and experienced the transcendent levels can test the theory. They characterise it further as a ‘state-specific-science’: in other words, knowledge is gained by means of an analysis, experimentation and communication within a specific state of meditation by the person himself or herself. For Hall and Lindzey, both a phenomenological description and a ‘state-specific-science’ are prone to subjectivity and possibly also to self-deception, because the person concerned is the only criterion against which an experience can be tested.

Although Jung (1953b) was familiar with Eastern thinking, and used principles such as *mandalas* and techniques such as the *I Ching*, he was sceptical about Westerners who tried to apply Eastern doctrines to themselves. He believed that people could do all kinds of things, such as practising yoga, changing their diets and learning theosophical texts, without ever reaching their own selves or realising that the

development of selfhood has to come from the self. He sees the transcendent states that are reached through meditation and yoga as no more than the absorption of the collective unconscious. Jung (1958a:534, 483) believed that his own method of individuation would lead to the same ultimate goal as meditation or yoga, namely away from the ego to a discovery of the real self, but that the methods of Easterners could not simply be taken over by Westerners.

I say to whomsoever I can: Study yoga – you will learn an infinite amount from it – but do not try to apply it, for we Europeans are not so constituted that we apply these methods correctly ... Instead of learning the spiritual techniques of the East by heart and imitating them in a Christian way – *imitatio Christi* – with a correspondingly forced attitude, it would be far more to the point to find out whether there exists in the unconscious an introverted tendency similar to that which has become the guiding spiritual principle of the East. We should then be in a position to build on our own ground with our own methods.

Despite Jung's reservations, and the criticism that can be directed at Eastern approaches such as Vedanta and Abhidhamma from a behaviourist point of view, these are nonetheless perspectives that can no longer be ignored by psychologists who attempt to understand human behaviour and functioning.

Dingfelder (2003) points out that psychologists and Buddhist monks have much in common in the endeavour to understand the workings of the human mind and even the compatibility between methodologies. He refers to the work of Davidson (Davidson & Harrington, 2001) who explores the relationship between brain functioning and consciousness and who headed a conference at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), titled *Investigating the mind: exchanges between Buddhism and the biobehavioral sciences on how the mind works*. The participants included researchers in psychology, neuroscience and Tibetan monks, including the Dalai Lama, discussing theories of cognitive control and attention, mental imagery and emotion. This symposium forms part of an ongoing series aimed at the collaboration between Western science and Buddhism. It seems that an interdisciplinary understanding between Western psychology and Buddhism can be beneficial for both traditions interested in human functioning and the mind and as Davidson remarks: 'There is a lot we can learn from these traditions – the time is right for collaboration' (cited by Dingfelder, 2003).

Self-evaluation question

- Critically evaluate the contribution of Buddhism as a perspective in personology.

16.20 Suggested reading

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Chapter 17

African perspectives

Henning Viljoen and Desmond Painter

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17.1 Outcomes

- Understand the nature of the **challenge of African perspectives** in personology to mainstream psychological thinking about the person.
- Describe the various **cosmic orders** underlying the African view of the person and worldview.
- Explain the different elements that comprise the **fabric of the African self** as conceptualised by Augustine Nwoye.
- Distinguish between ideas of **optimal psychological functioning** in an African and in a Western context.
- Understand the role of the **underlying cosmic orders** in the African view of pathological behaviour and physical illness.
- Distinguish between **Western-style psychotherapy** and **African healing practices**.

17.2 Introduction and background

Does mainstream psychology accurately represent psychology in Africa?

Think back on the different conceptions of personhood, the different personality theories and accounts of individual development and psychological distress you have encountered throughout this book. To what extent do you, as an **African**, recognise yourself, your experiences and life challenges, the social relationships you are in, and your concept and sense of being an individual person as well as a member of a community, in these theories? To what extent would you say they capture the dynamics of your life, provide you with a compass for the difficult business of developing a sense of self and belonging, of figuring out who and what to be, in the specific time and place in which you live? To what extent are the values and practices of that which inform your society, culture and history, reflected in the foundational assumptions of mainstream thinking in personology?

KEY TERM

African: refers to a polymorphous grouping of indigenous peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa

Chances are that at least some of the theories and concepts discussed in this book resonate with you – Freud’s description of the generational strife and sexual desire, perhaps, or Frankl’s depiction of the search for meaning under conditions of extreme adversity. Do you think this resonance is due to the empirical correctness and universal applicability of these theories, or is it a consequence of the considerable cultural authority that psychology as a discipline has managed to attain over the last hundred years, not only in the West, but in other parts of the world as well? Is our relation to psychology mediated perhaps not so much by its objective status as a science, but by the same processes of *globalisation* and especially American cultural dissemination which have made us consumers of – and model ourselves according to! – Hollywood movies, TV series and popular music?

It is indeed also possible that, as an African student, and especially a black African student, you find at least some of the work covered in this book overly Western in its orientation, assumptions and focus – that it neglects the experiences of black people

and traditions of thinking about the person and society that are indigenous to Africa, and that still inform and structure the experiences and practices of millions of people on this continent, and also in the African diaspora. What is the use, you may be asking yourself, of a psychology that does not pay attention to your cultural background and worldview, that simply assumes and even validates cultural values – individualism, for example – that are not central to the life you live?

You would have good reason to ask these critical questions. Not only are almost all the major theorists in personology white – and the majority of them male – Europeans and Americans; their societal preoccupations, their cultural assumptions and their ideas of successful living reflect or critically respond to their own societies.

Psychology, despite its rapid international spread since the Second World War, still says very little about non-Western societies and individuals. It assumes that its models of personhood and behavioural dynamics are universally applicable and that it does not require any systematic engagement with *indigenous psychology* – that is, with the way people in other societies and from other cultures make sense of themselves and their relationships, and make sense of ‘psychic’ distress and develop modalities of ‘therapy’, independent of psychology as a scientific discipline.

This neglect can partly be attributed to the tendency towards a positivistic conception of science in much of psychology, as it has been discussed earlier in this book, with its privileging of universal ‘laws’ of behaviour. A psychology founded on these epistemological principles offers no conceptual space for *cultural difference*: culture is rendered psychologically meaningless; it is reduced to mere surface variations on the underlying themes of universal psychological mechanisms and processes. Psychology, in this view, can thus be internationalised without due attention to the cultural particularities of its new areas of application.

However, this neglect of cultural diversity, and of Africa and Africans in particular, also has a more problematic history. The epistemological assumptions on which psychology rests, and its own intellectual development, is closely associated with a history of **scientific racism** and *scientific colonialism*.

KEY TERM

scientific racism: the use of science to provide justification for racist ideas

In other words, psychology does not simply neglect other cultures, it contributed to a situation in which Western culture has been (and in many contexts remains) seen as the *cultural norm*, and other cultures – African and black people in particular – as ‘primitive’, as less developed and less able to develop, than Westerners. Scientific racism refers to instances where racism is given legitimacy and is justified on the grounds of scientific ‘evidence’. Historically, scientific racism was an important ingredient in the ideological justification of *Western imperialism* and the colonial subjection and exploitation of the non-Western world (Teo, 2005). Psychology significantly contributed to this state of affairs. Teo (2005) mentions Paul Broca (1824–1880), the man who became famous for locating the area in the brain (now called Broca’s area) where speech loss (aphasia) occurs, but he was also a leader in the development of scientific racism and considered non-Westerners as intellectually

less endowed than Westerners. Teo (2005) also mentions Francis Galton (1822–1911), an equally famous figure in the history of scientific psychology, who also denigrated the intellectual abilities of non-Europeans and especially Africans.

While the majority of psychologists today reject these ideas and profess the equal value of all people and the principle of anti-racism, scientific colonialism has deeper roots and is more difficult to dispel from psychology. Scientific colonialism in the field of psychology refers here firstly to the *ethnocentric*, and especially *Euro-* and *American-centric* nature of psychology, both in terms of who produces this psychology and where it is produced (the vast majority of psychology is still produced by White Europeans and Americans, and at universities on those continents) and in terms of the *cultural assumptions* and values informing that psychology and how these assumptions and values are then imposed upon people in other parts of the world. This leads to the misrepresentation and mistreatment of cultural others, even when the aim is not racist at all. According to Teo (2005:165), ‘Scientific racism is to colonialism as hidden culture-centrism is to neo-colonialism.’ Consequently, according to Teo (2005:160):

The universalization of Western psychological concepts to non-Western cultures is an unwarranted practice. This practice also shows that the concept of inferiority is no longer applied to the nature of human groups, but it relates to conceptualizations of psychological topics. It is assumed that non-Western theories of mental life are not worthy of examination because they are assumed to be inferior. This is the current face of neo-colonialism in psychology.

Even when psychology is taken on by Africans themselves, in African universities and other sites of psychological thinking and practice, the neo-colonial structure of the discipline is not always successfully challenged. Western theories and concepts are often simply assumed to be superior; they dominate the curricula, the research that gets done and the various forms of psychotherapeutic practice. Very few universities in South Africa, for example, even today teach ‘African psychology’ in any form. According to Nwoye (2014:57):

... modern scientific psychology, drawing exclusively upon the empirical, positivistic, mechanistic, and materialistic traditions of the West, gained absolute ascendancy in African academies as part of the general impact of our colonial contact with the West. For this reason, the study of psychology in African universities became the exclusive province of mainstream Western psychology. This situation severely overshadowed and encumbered any early attempts to introduce African perspectives to psychology in African universities.

In response to this situation of scientific racism, psychological colonialism and mere neglect, various *African perspectives* began to emerge in psychology over the last few decades. These perspectives firstly function as a critique of existing psychology, focusing on its neglect and misrepresentation of Africa and Africans; and secondly as an alternative psychology, developing an autonomous set of accounts of the psychology of Africans, or developing a psychology responsive to Africans and their everyday lives.

Is there an 'African psychology'?

African psychology, as a unique perspective in the discipline rather than just a focus on Africa, has its origins in the USA, where 'black psychology' developed in the 1960s in reaction to the dominance of 'Eurocentric psychology'. The Association of Black Psychologists (ABP) was established in America in 1968, and their journal, *The Journal of Black Psychology*, is still a major forum for the development of African-centric ideas in the discipline (Azibo, 1996). In his pioneering work, Nobles (1972) laid the philosophical foundations for an African perspective in psychology, which led to a number of predominantly Afro-American psychologists (Nian Akbar; Daudi Ajani ya Azibo; Joseph A Baldwin, also known as Kobi KK Kamon; RL Jones; WW Nobles; JL White), starting to publish work based on these foundations. (See Azibo's *African Psychology in historical perspective and related commentary*, (1996), for references; see also Stevens (2015), for a contemporary historical overview of Black Psychology.)

It took much longer, however, for African psychology perspectives to be developed in Africa itself, and be focused on African lives on this continent rather than in the United States. Holdstock (2000) critically examines mainstream psychology's view and provides, to date, the most comprehensive overview of an African perspective on psychology. He accuses mainstream psychologists of neglecting the possibility that Africa may have psychological dimensions that are singularly 'unique and valid'. He is of the opinion that 'relevant and applicable methodologies are required to unravel and understand the African psyche' (2000:2).

However, an overarching psychological perspective, or paradigm, based on indigenous concepts does not yet exist – but it should be mentioned that African psychology is developing strongly in South Africa at the moment, with the development of a professional organisation and much creative theoretical work (Nwoye, 2006, 2014, 2015). In this chapter we present some of the assumptions and features of this developing tradition in psychology, relating to the central issues in personology and personality psychology.

What are the main obstacles to developing an African perspective in personology?

Around the turn of the century the question of the applicability of Western psychology in Africa and the relevance of this knowledge for people of African origin has become a prominent topic of debate. On the one hand, there were those against acknowledging the importance of indigenous psychologies, even accusing such a notion as supporting 'apartheid' (Nell, 1990; Seedat & Nell, 1990); on the other hand, there emerged a strong call for the Africanisation of psychology based on the argument that an understanding of the complexities of traditional indigenous African epistemologies is necessary for the development of psychological knowledge appropriate for Africans (Viljoen, 1995; Dawes, 1998;

Holdstock, 2000; Eagle, 2004). According to Dawes (1998:7), the impetus for the quest to Africanise psychology can be ascribed to three factors.

- The fact that psychology ‘collaborated in the oppression of American blacks and in the African colonial project through the invidious comparison of the “primitive” (African) with the “modern” (Western) mind’; this applies especially to the development of the ‘Africentric paradigm’ and ‘Black Psychology’ in the USA.
- The fact that psychology in the USA and South Africa ‘has had little relevance to the problems facing the black and the poor’. When it did pay attention to these populations, the discipline used models which were unsuited to understanding the local conditions of life, with the result that the effectiveness of psychology in resolving the problems of these populations could be questioned.
- The claim ‘that psychologies imported to the continent do not accurately portray African life and mentality’, thus questioning the appropriateness and applicability of mainstream theoretical and empirical knowledge for Africa.

The debate is on-going. While most psychologists in South Africa, for example, agree that psychology had been complicit in colonialism and apartheid, and remains too Euro- and American-centric, there is still considerable disagreement about how best psychology should be ‘Africanised’. Some reject the essentialism of an African (or Africanist) perspective that claims Africans have a different kind of psychology from Westerners, and instead believe that psychology should be developed from the perspective of living in their everyday lives and for their benefit; and not from the perspective of an assumed ontology and historical cultural continuity, of ‘Africa’ as an ontological fact. Others are instead trying to develop a uniquely ‘African psychology’, based precisely on ontological claims about the nature of African reality. We will not continue this debate here. This chapter focuses on the latter, the development of a unique ‘African perspective’ in psychology.

Self-evaluation question

- Discuss the claim that psychology was historically complicit with colonialism and racism.
- Why is there no uniform African perspective in psychology? Is such a view necessary in psychology?
- Discuss the main obstacles in developing an African perspective in psychology.

17.3 The view of the person and the worldview underlying the perspective

Despite the obvious diversity of regions, people, languages and cultural expressions on the African continent, many proponents of African psychology nonetheless maintain that it is possible and indeed necessary to refer to this development in the singular. African psychology is not just psychology *in* Africa; it is also not just a collection of different African indigenous psychologies. Instead, as an integrative alternative perspective in the discipline, African psychology assumes and expresses

a unity of consciousness and worldview, an identifiable and inclusive *African* way of being, living and relating. According to Nwoye (2015:97):

... behind and beyond the observable and obvious diversities and pluralisms of historical experience in Africa and the impressive attempts by social and cultural anthropologists to codify it, there is a metaphysical unity, a hidden common ground, a mainstream, indeed a central worldview undergirding them all, namely the belief in the principle of complementarity of contraries or the 'dance of opposites' in African thought.

African psychology is therefore rooted within an Africentric paradigm that assumes a common African worldview and view of the person: 'a generic African self is derived from a common African cultural genus and a metaphysical unity' (Nwoye, 2006:120). According to many scholars, this characteristic African view of the person and worldview is founded on a holistic and **anthropocentric ontology** (Akbar, 1996; Kambon, 1996; Biko, 1998; Teffo and Roux, 1998; Holdstock, 2000; Eagle, 2004). This implies that humans form an indivisible whole with the cosmos (and therefore a unity with God, other human beings and nature), and function as the point of departure and the centre of the universe – 'a person-centred society' – from which everything is understood and explained. Holdstock (2000) describes holism in Africa as something that people experience in their daily lives and they respect the connectedness of all things to form an indivisible whole.

KEY TERM

anthropocentric ontology: implies that humans form the point of departure as well as the centre of the universe

Within this indivisible cosmic whole, Sow (1980) maintains that three cosmic orders or realities can, theoretically, be distinguished, namely the macro-, meso- and micro-cosmos. These do, however, blend together in practical, everyday life.

What are the meanings and practical implications of the three cosmic orders for African behaviour?

17.3.1 The macro-cosmos

In Africentric thought, the macro-cosmos refers to the *domain in which God is encountered*. This is the order in which the religious existence that enfolds the full humaneness of traditional Africans is grounded.

Sow (1980) points out that according to various African myths, there was originally no distinction between God and humans, and that they lived with one another. However, God withdrew from day-to-day human existence and as a result people had to become self-reliant. This then gave rise to humans' first religious experiences. This withdrawal of God should not be taken to refer to the Judaeo-Christian conception of the 'Fall of Man'. It is rather the transcendence of God, with the **ancestors** serving as the all-important intervening medium and contact with God. For everyday existence, the ancestors are therefore more important than God, and they form an inherent part of daily African functioning.

KEY TERM

ancestors: represent archetypes from the collective unconscious

The daily functioning of the African person in a traditional context is seen to be fundamentally a *religious functioning* (Mbiti, 1989; Biko, 1998; Holdstock, 2000). Africans are said to be 'notoriously religious', not necessarily in the sense of church-

going or being devoted to a specific religious dogma, but in the sense that all levels of life are imbued with religion. Mbiti (1989:2) describes the inherent nature of African religion as follows:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.

Accordingly, there is no distinction between sacred and worldly, between religion and non-religion, or between a spiritual and a physical, material facet of life.

In addition, traditional religion does not focus primarily on the individual, but on the community the individual belongs to. This is thus interlinked with the African's *collective functioning* on the micro-cosmic level (see below). Mbiti (1990:2) claims that:

... in traditional society there are no irreligious people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community.

With the exception of Jung's psychodynamic view of religion, few Western personality theories recognise the religious basis or even dimensions of human functioning. This aspect of African psychology thus offers an opportunity for a reinvigoration of the psychology of religious experience, not just in African people, but in other contexts as well. African psychology can be said to confront Western psychology with an important dimension of existence that it frequently neglects.

17.3.2 The meso-cosmos

The meso-cosmos, in turn, figures as *a kind of no man's land*, where coincidence and the forces of the ancestors, malignant spirits and sorcerers hold sway. This meso-cosmos is situated in the world of individual and collective imagination, and it involves the *ancestors*, the *living reality* (animals and humans) as well as the *natural physical reality* (forests, bushes, trees, rivers, etc.).

According to the Africentric view, it is with reference to this level, which is the domain of the ancestors, malignant spirits, sorcerers and Shamans (healers, priests and rainmakers), rather than with reference to a personalised unconscious or behavioural modelling, that African people tend to explain their own behaviour, conflicts, as well as events such as sickness and death (Straker, 1994; Holdstock, 2000; Lebakeng, Sedumedi & Eagle in Hook & Eagle 2002; Eagle, 2004). Throughout Africa, the most important of these intermediary forces are the ancestors, who mediate between the living and the 'living dead' (i.e. the remembered dead or ancestors) and continue to influence the lives of the living. Holdstock (2000) notes that the ancestors, contrary to Western belief, are not experienced as deities or spirits, but as persons with whom a speaking relationship can be attained. (The aspect of the intermediary forces will also be discussed under pathological behaviour.)

The level of the meso-cosmos is of utmost importance for the personologist, because it is the level from which an African perspective in psychology explains human dynamics. In contrast to some Western-oriented theories that explain behaviour as the outcome of *intrapsychic dynamics* (such as Freud, Jung and Erikson) or *interpersonal dynamics* (such as Adler, Horney and Rogers), the African perspective attributes behaviour wholly to *external agents* outside the person. Drawing on the work of Shutte (1994), Eagle (2004:5), states that the self is seen as ‘outside’ (referring to the natural world and social relations) and not ‘inside’, as ‘a self that controls and changes the world’. In this regard, the African view corresponds more with behaviourism, which also attributes behaviour to an external agent; as well as with aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis and other postmodern approaches, which locate the unconscious externally in the socially shared system of signifiers, rather than intra-psychically. African psychology thus challenges the assumptions of freedom and autonomy that are so central in much of Western psychology, and reveal these as Western cultural assumptions rather than universal facts.

KEY TERMS

macro-cosmic order: the domain of God and religion

meso-cosmic order: a kind of no man’s land where coincidence, the ancestors and the forces of malignant spirits and sorcerers hold sway

micro-cosmic order: the domain of the individual person in his or her everyday collective existence

One of the consequences of modernisation – which in Africa includes also colonialism and its associated cultural dislocation, devaluation and even destruction – is a loss of *historical rootedness and continuity* found in the macro- and meso-cosmic orders of existence. This is a form of cultural malaise, often mediated and further fuelled by colonial racism and its negative representations of Africans, which brings crisis to both individuals and communities. Some proponents of African psychology thus claim that Africans suffer psychologically for having lost some of their rootedness in the **macro-** and **meso-cosmic orders** that should serve as guidelines for their daily lives in the **micro-cosmic order**. But even among modernised and postcolonial Africans, traditional cultural sources for living are not entirely atrophied and the influence of the ancestors not completely lost. It retains its actuality and psychological reality in the lives of individuals and communities in Africa. In the words of the well-known writer, Es’kia Mphahlele (1972:122):

I was brought up on European history and literature and religion and made to identify with European heroes while African heroes were being discredited ... I later rejected Christianity. And yet I could not return to ancestral worship in any overt way. But this does not invalidate my ancestors for me. Deep down there inside my agnostic self, I feel reverence for them.

According to Mphahlele (1959:54), in another of his books, this is quite a common experience among educated Africans:

What I do know is that about eight out of every ten educated Africans, most of whom are also professed Christians, still believe firmly in the spirits of their ancestors. We don’t speak to one another about it among the educated. But when we seek moral guidance and inspiration and hope, somewhere in the recesses of our being, we grope around for some link with those spirits.

17.3.3 The micro-cosmos

The micro-cosmos is the domain of the individual person in his or her everyday *collective existence*, which is wholly influenced by the macro-cosmos and the meso-cosmos. According to Boon (2007:26) this collective existence among Africans is

KEY TERM

ubuntu: a code of ethics governing one's interaction with others, implying that a person is only a person because of other people

typified by the philosophy of *ubuntu* (Zulu) or *batho* (Sotho), which implies 'that a person is only a person because of other people'. *Ubuntu* is thus a code of ethics which governs one's interaction with others, and Boon typifies it as 'morality, humaneness, compassion, care, understanding and empathy; it is one of sharing and hospitality, of honesty and humility'. Although it is difficult to translate *ubuntu* into English, Holdstock (2000) maintains that *ubuntu* refers to our human and humane qualities that differentiate human beings from animals – human beings' ability to have feelings such as concern, sensitivity, tenderness, reverence and understanding.

Ubuntu is not a theoretical construction, but it manifests itself through the interaction of people and through the 'truly good things that people unthinkingly do for each other and for the community' (Boon, 2007:26). People with *ubuntu* do not take advantage of others, but use their strength in a compassionate and gentle way to care and help others, notably the weak, children and older people. For example, in traditional society orphans and problem children are drawn into the local community and absorbed into other families; in this way everyone becomes the mother, father, brother or sister of these children. This is in stark contrast to the isolation of such children in orphanages and homes under professional guidance in many Western societies.

Holdstock (2000:202) links the concept of *ubuntu* to certain aspects of Rogers' person-centred approach. He points out that Rogers emphasises empathy, positive regard and congruence as essential elements to establish sound human relationships, and as necessary and sufficient conditions for psychotherapy. According to him, these three conditions embody 'the way the concept of *ubuntu* comes to life in Africa'. This is also the way in which he himself understood and experienced *ubuntu* when he did practical work as 'witch-doctor professor' in close association with African healers.

Enrichment**Is *ubuntu* too good to be true?**

Dooms (1989), as cited by Holdstock (2000:106), questions the ultra-humaneness embedded in *ubuntu* as a dominant ethos that guides all human interaction in Africa. He also questions the exclusively positive interpretation of *ubuntu*, in which there is no place for any anti-social behaviour, maintaining that such a view does not take reality into account (e.g., present strife and conflict which prevail everywhere in Africa), but rather equates reality with the biblical 'Garden of Eden'. The essence of Patrick Dooms' questioning highlights, according to Holdstock, the absence of the concepts of evil and of hell in the African worldview as the opposites of the concepts of good and of heaven; and it begs for recognition of the darker, shadow side of human functioning, in Jungian terms, to account for human suffering afflicted by one person onto another. Based on Dooms' experience of growing up as a young Black person during the apartheid years and encountering a great deal of the horrors that humankind is capable of, Holdstock granted Dooms' viewpoint.

What is your view on *ubuntu* as reflection of reality, as an ethical ideal, and possibly as a misunderstood and perhaps misused term in contemporary South African society?

A guiding idea in many contributions to African psychology is that it is particularly in the domain of collective existence where the difference in ethos and values between the Westerner and the African creates important differences in behavioural modalities, particularly in respect to the relationship between the individual and the community.

According to Nobles (1991) and Kambon (1996), the European ethos rests on the *principle of individual survival* enshrined in the theory of evolution, which is based on the survival of the fittest, and on the divine commandment of Judaeo-Christian origin to control and rule nature. These two principles have given rise to values such as 'competition', 'individual rights' and 'autonomy', and to the importance of 'individuality', 'uniqueness', 'responsibility for oneself' and 'individual differences' as concepts for understanding and explaining the psychological modalities of behaviour of Western people. In personality theories, these principles are expressed in concepts such as 'ego' or 'I-identity', 'self-concept', and 'self-realisation' or 'self-actualisation', which are catered for in almost all psychoanalytical theories (Freud, Jung, Adler, Erikson, Horney and Fromm), as well as the person-oriented theories (Maslow and Rogers).

The traditional African ethos rests on other, equally important principles, such as *the survival of the community* and union with nature. These principles give rise to values that centre around 'co-operation', 'interdependence' and 'collective responsibility'. In correspondence with these values, the psychological modalities of behaviour of 'individuality', 'uniqueness' and 'differences' are understood to be replaced with modalities such as 'communality', 'group orientation' and 'agreement'.

If we were to apply African principles and values to a construct such as the *self concept*, it would mean defining this as an '*us/we*' rather than as an '*I*'. According to Nobles (1995:177), this implies that 'one's self-identity is therefore always a *people* identity, or what could be called an *extended identity* or *extended self*.' Azibo (1996:50–52) conceptualises this principle of self-extension as a 'holistic interconnectedness and interdependence of all entities within the universe', and he maintains that the extended self, 'has to be understood as an unbroken circle encompassing an infinite past, an infinite future, and all contemporary Africans'.

According to Mbiti (1989:106), the personhood and identity of the traditional African is entirely embedded in his or her *collective existence*. He explains this as follows:

Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his being, his duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and his relatives whether dead or living. When he gets married, he is not alone, neither does the wife 'belong' to him alone. So also the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father's or mother's name. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'. This is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man.

This negation of a singularised, almost pre-social personal identity, which is partly shared by an Eastern perspective (in which the emphasis is on the transcendence of an ego or unique identity), and by some post-modern views (in which the ego-identity is eliminated or underplayed), is also affirmed by various African writers and philosophers such as Nkrumah (1964), Senghor (1964), Nyerere (1968) and Kamalu (1990). In his reflections on the collective existence of the African, Senghor (1964:72–73) expresses the following opinion:

In contrast to the classic European, the Negro-African does not draw a line between himself and the object; he does not hold it at a distance, nor does he merely look at it and analyse it ... the Negro-African sympathises, abandons his personality to become identical with the Other, dies to be reborn in the Other. He does not assimilate; he is assimilated. He lives a common life with the Other; he lives in a symbiosis ... 'I think therefore I am' Descartes writes ... The Negro-African could say 'I feel, I dance the Other; I am'.

The implication of such a view would appear to be that the Western injunction to realise or actualise the self does not play the same central role in the daily life of the traditional African as it does among Westerners. The question that is raised by this, for the personologist, is whether there is any use for thinking of individual (African) lives in terms of 'personality' at all? The question here is not one of whether Africans, like their Western counterparts, are naturally endowed with 'a personality' – a question that would rekindle the discourse of scientific racism, in which Africans are thought to *lack* something in comparison to Westerners. The question is instead whether the *concept* 'personality' is able to capture the dynamic expressions and experiences of personhood outside the context of modern Western societies. Is 'personality' not perhaps so fundamentally tied to Western cultural assumptions about personhood as to make it almost impossible to apply it universally without distorting the experiences and lives of non-Western others?

Self-evaluation questions

- Describe the three cosmic orders forming the basis of the African view of the person and worldview, and indicate in what respects the meaning and implications for behaviour of these orders differ from or accord with a European-American perspective.
- Critically discuss the ethos of *ubuntu* and how it impacts on people's lives.
- Describe the differences between European and African views on the individual–society relationship and indicate the implications these differences have on a Western-oriented perspective in personology.

17.4 Augustine Nwoye's account of the fabric of the African self

Is there a systematic, integrative theory of the self, developed from an African perspective, in contemporary personology?

One of the most influential exponents of the African perspective in psychology in the world today is **Augustine Nwoye**. Formerly from the Department of Psychology at Kenyatta University in Kenya, Nwoye is currently a Full Professor of Psychology

at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He is the author of numerous publications in which he develops an African perspective that functions both as a *protest* against mainstream Western psychology and its neglect and misrepresentation of black and African lives, and as ‘a psychology of rehabilitation of the culture and orientation of research in Africa universities’, one that will ‘derive anchor, not in comparing Africans and Europeans, but rather in people’s everyday needs, epistemologies and worldviews’ (Nwoye, 2015:99). In other words, what Nwoye requires of psychology is that it not only looks *at* Africa and Africans, but that psychology in Africa is developed *from the perspective of and in relation to the culture and worldview of Africans*; that it will be *for* Africans, relevant to their lives and struggles – in the same way the European and American psychology developed its theories, concepts and strategies of intervention from the perspective and in relation to the culture of those respective societies.

About a decade ago, in one of his most important publications, Nwoye (2006) systematically developed *a modern psychological account of the African self*, one that is rooted not in the philosophical assumptions of European philosophy, but in the rich tradition of African thought and culture, and aimed at illuminating the psychological lives of Africans in modern, 21st-century Africa. Nwoye’s (2006:119) main point of reference is:

... the recognition that the prevailing approach to the self, which is expounded in the literature of Western European philosophers such as Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Hobbes, Kant, Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre, as well as by Euro-American personality theorists such as Freud, Adler, Jung, Maslow, Allport, Murray, Rogers, Kelly and Kohut, is foreign to the African notion of the individual/self.

For Nwoye, **the Western notion of the self is incompatible with the African view** – and hence also not relevant for understanding African lives and supporting Africans in psychological need. Nwoye appraises the Western model of the self not simply as culturally foreign in the African context, but as ‘less inclusive and extensive than the African view’ (Nwoye, 2006:119). This implies that Western and African perspectives do not need to exist in isolation, each forever locked into its cultural sphere of development and application. It also means that the overly individualist Western approach can benefit from paying attention to the more inclusive and extensive African model, and reassess its own shortcomings and ability to truly reflect even the Western experience, in the light of the theoretical challenge from Africa. In this regard the African perspective lends momentum to existing critiques of ‘personality’, and the distorted, reductive views of personal, relational and societal life it often supports, in critical and human science approaches to psychology (e.g. Mills, 2015).

Nwoye (2006:119) further claims that the Western view:

... is imbued with an emphasis on reason and a denial of the significance of the body. Thus, unlike the Western view, which sees the self essentially as a substantive inner agency capable of choosing its own values, charting its own directions and commenting on itself in the manner of a self-governor, the African perspective, among other things, consists of multiple aspects of the relationship between the individual and the community.

You will recognise in this description the main elements of the African worldview and its different levels of existence, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter. The Western self has historically been conceptualised as existing largely independent of its community, with its cultural context and relational entanglements often featuring only as a backdrop to psychological processes that are intra-psychically determined, rather than informing, mediating or even constructing psychological life. In opposition to this, according to Nwoye (2006:119), the African self is not a self-contained, exclusive entity, but an *extensive entity* ‘that projects itself with varying degrees of intensity into other realms of human existence: social, economic, religious, political and cultural, etc.’

What are the dimensions of the African self?

Based on the above depiction of these cultural and historical characteristics, Nwoye (2006) proceeds to work out *the psychological dimensions of the African self* in a theoretical account which locates individuals within tradition, but also pays close attention to the contradictions and tensions of contemporary life on the African continent. The theory is thus not simply a romantic attempt to recapture a lost world of tradition, but to understand – not in terms imposed by Western psychology, but in terms that arise from Africa itself – the way contemporary Africans understand themselves, relate to others, and deal with the stresses and contradictions of everyday life in Africa and the world. According to Nwoye (2006:120):

This entails painting a synoptic image of the fabric of the African self that would highlight its nature and principal constituents, sources and crises, as well as elaborate on a conception that would do more justice to it than is possible with our continued reliance on the Western model of the self as standard for defining and understanding ourselves.

Nwoye’s (2006) *synoptic* theory, by which he means a theory that aggregates rather than isolates constituent factors, and thus functions as a *holistic* rather than a *reductionist* account, is not meant to be a ‘personality theory’ in the Western sense. It is not an attempt to say something about psychic structure, dynamics and development as located at the level of the individual, abstracted from culture and society, but an attempt to understand the individual as socially and culturally mediated. It is for this reason that Nwoye (2006:120) talks about *mapping the fabric of the African self*:

I use the term *the fabric of the African self* to refer to the synoptic aggregate of dimensions/endowments, including orientations, beliefs and characteristic habits, customs and shared meanings, perceived in Africa as attributes of a normal/full-fledged African human being. I do not claim that the Western model is devoid of (some of) the principal constituents of the African self, emphasizing not only its subjectivity and individualism but also its communal attributes and a host of other elements unsung in the Western European/North American account of the self.

When Nwoye (2006) states that the African self is a *synoptic aggregate* he means that it is made up of eight complementary constituents/dimensions. These are: (1) the embodied self; (2) the generative self; (3) the communal self;

(4) the narratological self; (5) the melioristic self; (6) the structural self; (7) the liminal self; and (8) the transcendental/spiritual self. According to Nwoye (2006:121), rather than isolated structural components, factors or variables, these dimensions ‘blend together in an indivisible mesh’. Each dimension functions as a source of self-fulfilment and social belonging, but can also become a source of stress and psychopathology.

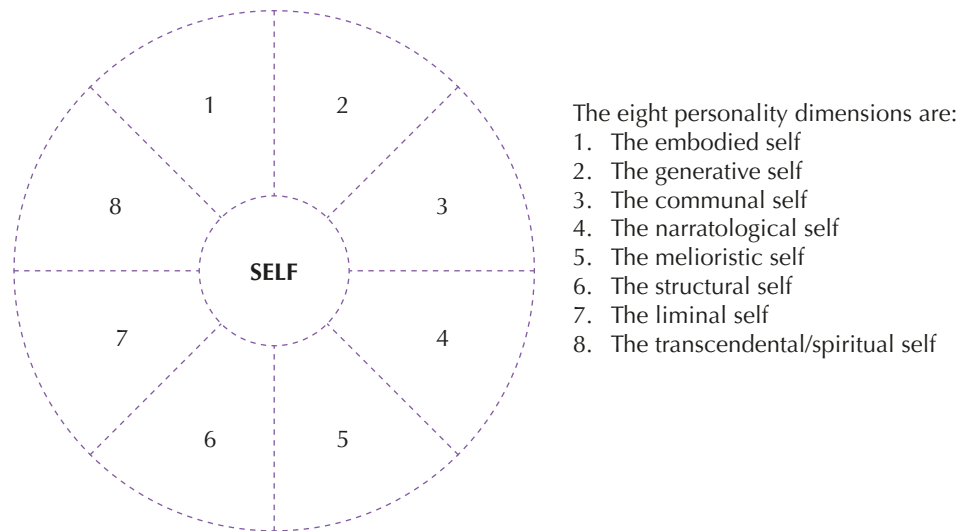


Figure 17.2 Adaptation of Nwoye’s (2006:143) spatial representation of the African self. The number in each cell refers to one of the dimensions of the African as listed here. The broken lines reflect the idea of co-penetration of forces between the different dimensions. The broken outer circle stands for the idea of inter-penetration of influence between self and community.

Source: Africa World Press

17.4.1 The embodied self

The self has a body. This may seem obvious enough, but according to Nwoye (2006) it is the least emphasised aspect of personhood in existing Western theories of personality. He is certainly correct in this assessment. Apart from Freud’s insistence on the sexual body, the essential *embodiment* of the self has not been given much attention in any of the theories you have encountered in this book. It is only in the last couple of decades that phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2013) and feminists like Judith Butler (2011) have critiqued the neglect of the body and embodiment in Western intellectual traditions, but these critiques have not made much inroads into mainstream psychological theorising about the person.

For Nwoye (2006:121):

The concept of embodiment is used here to refer to the totality of the individual’s unique observable physical properties, including height, weight, skin colour, hair, finger-nails, finger prints, foot prints, body tone and symmetry and harmony of his/her overall external characteristics.

The embodied self is thus *that aspect of the self that is open and visible to others*; it is that which we present to others and that evokes a response from others that can be complimentary or derogatory. In the words of Nwoye (2006:123), the body ‘is an important asset for a successful life in Africa and in the Diaspora and represents a solid foundation for good mental health’. But negative feedback on my embodied self, on the body that I am, can also be the source of significant distress and even self-alienation. One of the great sources of stress at this level for Africans is the consequence of having a black skin in a society where blackness is targeted, stigmatised and denigrated; and where the desire to be white, as an approximation of ‘normality’ in a racist society, often presents as one of the pathologies of colonialism in Africa and the African Diaspora.

Enrichment

How your body represents you: an African perspective

Nwoye (2006:121–122) illustrates the role of even the most humble parts of our body, such as saliva or a bone, in representing us in our full being with the following example.

‘Among the Turukana of Kenya, for example, an elder who wants to bless me on my journey to Cambridge can do so by spitting a little of his/her saliva into my palm amidst a prayer of blessing for my safety and success. This symbolizes the idea that his/her spirit – and not just the saliva – is with me and supporting me. This same logic is behind the belief in Africa that taking some sand or one of my bones from where I am buried in a mass grave away from my home in order to re-bury me in a more befitting place in my own native home symbolizes the actual me being transferred from the alien territory to my home place. And this is believed to be so even though it is known that it is only but a part of me (e.g. my bone) that has been transferred.’

17.4.2 The generative self

The generative self refers to the agentic and enterprising capacities of the person. It encompasses, according to Nwoye (2006:125), ‘the seat of the self’s personal ambitions, plans and programs of life that are intended for its own betterment’. The generative self aims to ‘clear away obstacles that hinder its expansion and ascent in the world and by doing so to win the individual a place in society’. It is motivated to accumulate what Nwoye (2006) refers to as *distinctions of worth*: the forms of distinction and emblems of success (which do not have to be financial or material) that are valued in one’s community and mediates one’s noticeability and symbolic value in the community.

Just like the embodied self, the generative self can be a source of well-being and mental health, but also a source of significant distress. Because it is the part of the self that desires status, it can become ridden with *status anxiety* and a sense of failure. According to Nwoye, the generative self becomes arrested and consequently besieged with shame when the African individual is afflicted with poverty, for example.

Like racism, then, poverty is a systemic condition faced by many black people in racist and formerly colonial societies, and it has a direct bearing on their psychological well-being and sense of personal value. As Nwoye (2006:127) explains it:

This means that in the African context the issue of politics and economics are important in the making of the self. In this way, the phenomenon of pure physical being, or *being for nothing* or *odi ndu onwu ka mma*, as the Igbo of Nigeria will say, is not enough. The goal is the search for significance, and for mobility, in order to make a mark in one's society. For this reason, a bankrupt generative self is to be understood as an embarrassment to the self, and in this sense it is crushing, shameful and a disease of mental health because for the African individual, as we have seen above, a good life and wellbeing implies a life blessed with prosperity/wealth, children, healthy life, peace and joy.

17.4.3 The communal self

This is a dimension that many previous accounts of personhood and the self in Africa have focused on. For Nwoye (2006:129), the communal self refers to *the relational and inclusive character of the African self*.

It thus places emphasis on the phenomenon of social solidarity or the factor of mutual dependence of selves, including the living and the dead (that is, the ancestors), in Africa.

Unlike the Western view of the self, which focuses on the subjectivity and individualism of the person, and thus underplays the communal aspects of becoming and being a person, the African view of the self insists on '*a dialectical interpenetration of the individual and community in which neither has full primacy*' (Nwoye, 2006:129). The community serves as a source of social and emotional sustenance for the individual; however, also this dimension of the self can cause distress. Nwoye (2006) claims that many Africans, especially those who become socially mobile and economically autonomous, find themselves under severe pressure to financially assist, sometimes to their own detriment, economically less fortunate relatives. Students, for example, may find themselves using a study bursary to support relatives, causing financial stress for themselves at university. This is referred to as *an economy of affection*: 'The danger of the pressure of this economy of affection must be accepted as one of the negative consequences of the generally positive ethos of the communal self' (Nwoye, 2006:131).

Enrichment

According to Nwoye (2006:130), 'the African's feelings of belongingness to the larger community must not be exaggerated or understood as implying the belief in Africa that the cultural community has an absolute priority over the individual. Rather, the emphasis is placed on the concept that for the African self *the locus of value is both within and outside the self*.

This caveat implies that the African individual, despite his or her great sense of community, can set some legitimate personal goals unimpeded by the community and, in this manner, participate in the determination or definition of his or her own fate and identity.'

Do you have experience of this communal dimension of the self? Do you experience it as self-sustaining, or as a source of obligations and demands? How does one juggle the tension between individuality and communal belonging in an increasingly individualistic culture such as ours?

17.4.4 The melioristic self

Nwoye (2006:131) distinguishes the melioristic self from the generative self by saying that whilst the latter gives enterprising force to the African individual, the former ‘acts as the self’s resident therapist for questioning misfortune, for responding to uncertainty and for coping with the ordinary challenges and adversities of the African experience.’ It is *that part of the self that assists the individual in finding meaning in life* and expanding his or her capacity for self-awareness. It facilitates the confrontation with the gap we all experience between how things are and how we believe they should be. In this sense it provides one, according to Nwoye, with a time consciousness beyond the mere present, keeping one mindful of the past one builds on and the future that will yet unfold. According to Nwoye, this time consciousness provides a solid foundation for good mental health: ‘*meliorism*, unlike naïve or unrealistic optimism or pessimism, is the belief that a difficult situation has a way of giving way to a better situation ...’ (Nwoye, 2006:133).

However, in this dimension of the self there also lurks a shadow side. Nwoye (2006:133) believes the melioristic attitude can pose a danger to social stability when people start to draw more inspiration from it than it can provide. He refers to constant wars and overinvestment in political parties: a potentially self-destructive undermining of the value present in the name of a constantly elusive better future.

17.4.5 The narratological self

The narratological self, as Nwoye (2006:133) conceives of it, refers to that dimension of the African self that ‘reflects the sediments and influence of the cultural memory of the people on the modern African imagination’. This is the traditional mode of storytelling and the cultural role of the storyteller, which had been internalised and now connects the modern African consciousness to a larger historical imagination.

The narratological is thus the mode whereby consciousness of self and consciousness of being part of a community, of social and psychological continuity, are entangled. It is in the form of the narratological self that the past inhabits the present, and the community inhabits the individual. According to Nwoye (2006), the narratological dimension of the African self generally helps the modern African to retain *a link with tradition*, and to draw from this the psychological nourishment that a communal, interpreted life provides. However, the domain of received meanings can also become a source of distress and retrogression when it becomes rigid and authoritarian, and when it is slavishly and inflexibly followed. Nwoye refers here explicitly to the negative influence of witchcraft.

17.4.6 The structural self

The structural dimension of the African self is conceived by Nwoye (2006) as the psychological counterpart of the embodied self that was discussed earlier. It is *the inner seat of individual thinking, feelings and will*. Unlike the Western model of the

self, this inner domain with its vital powers is located not in a mental apparatus (such as the unconscious), but in the organs of the body: head, heart, liver and stomach. Whilst this provides the African with a psychological vocabulary to articulate an autonomous existence, a life of thought, feeling and volition, it has also yielded a sprawling mythology of suspicion and hate: a world of evil eyes, bad hearts and organ trading for the purposes of ill intent towards others. This, according to Nwoye, is then the shadow side of this dimension of the African self.

17.4.7 The liminal self

KEY TERM

liminality: the condition of being in-between two states of being

Liminality refers to the condition of *being in a state of transition*, of inhabiting a world ‘in-between the state of a *no longer* and that of a *not yet*’ (Nwoye, 2006:137). Nwoye uses the concept of liminality, and elevates it to one of the crucial dimensions of the African self, because he believes Africans are particularly exposed, due to cultural and historical reasons, to situations of crisis and transitions. Culturally speaking, Nwoye (2006: 138) maintains that although life transitions in Western societies are also marked by liminality and rituals, these experiences are often intensified in Africa.

Although in the West it is true that people go through stages apparently marked by liminality and rituals, just as we do here in Africa, our own pattern tends to take a more intensified direction and is often full of contradictions and tensions. In particular, the idea of liminality of the self in the African context does not emphasize the mere passage through the principle stages of life, but it also has the tendency to over-delay this transcendation from one stage to the other and to emphasize the crisis of possibility of some people having to contend with the shame of being returned by fate to a state that has previously been understood to have been successfully transcended.

Liminality, however, marks the African experience also for historical reasons, such as the dislocations resulting from colonialism, war, poverty, etc. Increasingly, the period of being in-between becomes the norm: it does not remain merely a ritualised interface between different stages of life, but becomes a state of suspended being, of being unemployed, in a refugee camp, or other such social experiences which impact heavily on the psychological health of individuals.

17.4.8 The transcendental/spiritual self

The spiritual component of the African self is expressed in the emphasis that is placed by Africans, even in modern, post-traditional times, on *the sacred dimension of everyday life*. Part of this sacred dimension is the values and principles the individual lives by but had not personally chosen, marking another difference from the Western notion of an autonomous, psychologically integrated personality, where values and principles are privatised. Nwoye (2006:139) in this regard agrees with Mbiti (1989), as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, that Africans are exceptionally, even inherently, religious.

This exceptional religiosity is grounded on the fact that a typical African self is greatly dominated by a number of internalized beliefs and assumptions and attitudes reflecting the spiritual view of the people. A good number of these appear contrary to the Western notion of the self as a value-free agency in control of its fate in the world.

Nwoye (2006) identifies such internalised beliefs that guide the spiritual self. Firstly, a belief in a *Supreme Being* from whom all good things originate. The assumption is that this Being, or God, is involved in the everyday details of our lives, and that nothing happens unless it is approved by God. Secondly, a belief in the existence of *spiritual agencies* that are capable of impacting on our lives in both positive and negative ways. Thirdly, a belief that our *ancestors* and deceased relatives, even though they are physically dead, continue to have an impact on our lives. Fourthly, a belief that *thoughts and utterances have the power to bring about the things that are symbolised by them*; in other words, evil thoughts about someone could cause them real harm.

Enrichment

Nwoye's (2006:142) conclusions about the constituents, strengths and crises of the modern African self

- The African idea of the good life is not synonymous with the absence of pathology. Psychological health or happiness is an outcome of one being blessed with five major good things in life: life, prosperity, health, children, and peace and joy.
- The normal African self is disturbed by problems that are largely socially derived and culturally constructed.
- An individual's externality (or the body), as perceived and rated by self and others, is a significant dimension of the African self.
- The African self is not only in the skin, head, heart or liver. As a pragmatic and synoptic aggregate, it manifests itself in eight inter-penetrating components/ dimensions' – as discussed in the section above.

Watch the three-part lecture by Prof. Augustine Nwoye at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal on: What is African Psychology the psychology of?, published on 5 February 2015.

Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtVIh-pzgp3M>

Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxYu-Aara4vs>

Part 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NeYNScPLCA>

Activity

- Prepare a presentation on the eight dimensions of the fabric of the self as conceptualised by Augustine Nwoye in terms of both their contribution to a meaningful, psychologically healthy life, and as sources of psychological distress.

17.5 Optimal development and mental health

Is there a conception of 'optimal development' in Africa and how does it differ from the conception of optimal development in the West?

One of the dangers lurking in African perspectives in psychology, especially when articulated not by Africans themselves but from the outside, is that Africans and African culture can become represented in ways that, even though apparently positive, are in fact deeply colonial: they are represented from the vantage point of and often for the benefit of the West. There is a real danger of this in discussions of 'optimal development', where African culture easily becomes represented as still in possession of a fullness of being the modern Westerner has lost, and thus is reduced to a projection of Western wishes rather than allowed to speak in its own voice, in full cognisance of the struggles and contradictions of the present.

Pasteur and Toldson (1982), for example, believe that, because of their connectedness with their physical and spiritual environments and the balanced use of the left and right hemispheres of the brain, traditional Africans are better equipped to reach and sustain optimal development and psychological health than modern Westerners. According to them, the Westerner's functioning is dominated by the left hemisphere of the brain in an attempt to investigate, analyse and take things apart in order to understand and explain them logically. But this functioning is subject to an imbalance in the functioning of the right and left hemispheres. This imbalance causes tension and stress, and induces Westerners to seek help in all kinds of pharmaceutical and relaxation aids to relieve the tension. Pasteur and Toldson (1982:25) maintain that the holistic view of the person and worldview of Africans gives rise to the balanced use of both hemispheres.

A further factor that Pasteur and Toldson (1982:79) identify as promoting optimal development and functioning among Africans is their *collective existence*. The Westerner's stress and tension can, to a large extent, be ascribed to the accenting of individuality, which in practice constantly refers individuals back to themselves and places them predominantly in competitive relationships with their fellows, in which they measure themselves against others. By contrast, the selflessness of Africans, who are wholly rooted in their collective existence, offers the essential security that can counteract anxiety and tension. Pasteur and Toldson (1982) describe the advantages of group life as follows:

Invested in the group is a kind of super power that, being stronger than individual members, helps them control their weakness as individuals.

There is no doubt that these authors 'value' African culture, but the problem is that it is a mythologised, romanticised culture that is represented in this and similar accounts. Its 'Africentrism' only *apparently* places Africans at the centre of analysis. In reality Africans remain caught in time, as if they live in a different world altogether and do not deal with the stresses of modern life. At the centre of such accounts is still the modern Westerner, looking towards more 'exotic' (and often construed as 'primitive' vs 'modern') locales for cultural redemption, for a way out of the contradictions and forms of alienation that characterise life in contemporary Western societies.

Indeed, according to Pasteur and Toldson (1982:95), Westerners would do well to adopt features of the traditional African way of life in order to attain optimal development and mental health.

And it is Africa, and the people of Africa, to which we must turn for models of living, models of therapy, models of learning and instruction that allow for an enduring fulfilment and satisfaction, models that vibrate with nature's pulse – rhythm.

Interestingly, though, such romanticising ideas fuel not only colonial appreciations of Africa, but can also play a role in attempts at cultural rehabilitation from the effects of denigratory colonial stereotypes by Africans themselves. Biko (1998:27)

emphasised the role of *music, dancing and rhythm* in the daily lives of Africans, not only as means of communication, but also to attain emotional equilibrium.

Music in the African culture features in all emotional states. When we go to work, we share the burdens and pleasures of the work we are doing through music ... music and rhythm (are) not luxuries but part and parcel of our communication. Any suffering we experienced was made much more real by song and rhythm.

He also states that music is more than mere notes to meaningful sounds; it becomes the expression of real feelings in the course of which passive listening is not possible; active participation through dancing or singing becomes a means of expression, for example, mothers dance and sing with babies on their backs, or beat the drums with infants on their lap, virtually teaching rhythmic and dancing skill with mother's milk. Holdstock (2000:184) also underlines the importance of rhythm in the lives of people of sub-Saharan Africa, indicating the meaningful role it plays in poetry, music, art, theatre and in healing practices.

Music, dance and rhythm are all mechanisms that form an intricate part in the attainment of a fulfilled life amongst Africans, and play an important role as psychological healing devices.

Although one appreciates the value of these kinds of positive reappraisals of African life, especially against the background of so many negative colonial and racist stereotypes, one should guard against constructing Africa *for Westerners*; an African psychology is ultimately a psychology *for African*. More research is still needed about how Africans today define the good life, the meaningful life, and how they conceive the integration of being, in order to move beyond colonial stereotypes and various forms of *cultural romanticisation* in the discussion of African ideas of 'optimal development' in a psychological sense. As we have seen in the discussion of Nwoye's theory in the previous section, such an account will have to pay attention to various dimensions of functioning, including the body, the community and the domain of the spiritual.

Activity

- Provide a critical discussion of Pasteur and Toldson's view that the traditional African is in a better position to achieve optimal psychological development and health than the Westerner.

17.6 Views on psychopathology

How do traditional Africans view illness and pathological behaviour?

KEY TERM

holistic ontology: implies that humans form an indivisible whole with the cosmos

The African view of psychopathology cannot be separated from the **holistic ontology** and the role that the ancestors, malignant spirits and sorcerers play in determining their behaviour. Holistic ontology implies that health, whether it be physical, mental or societal, refers to a *state of wholeness and integration* and ill-health

KEY TERM**sangoma:** healer

refers to a *state of fragmentation and disintegration*. The Zulu healer Mutwa (1996) underlines the view that illness is seen as disharmony. When someone becomes ill, the **sangoma** knows that there is some discord in the harmony of the universe and that this must be corrected in order for the person to be healed.

The premise of ‘wholeness’, according to Maiello (1999:224), is based on the body–mind assumption that:

In African culture, illness is not split into either physical or mental suffering. Body and mind are a unit, and the mind is never experienced as separate from the body.

This view implies that, from an African perspective, mental illness is not devoid of physical symptoms and that *all mental disorders should be seen as psychosomatic disorders*. Gumede (1990) points out that this psychosomatic interrelation is based on the concept of a *primary and indivisible unity* between body and mind, rather than on the Western idea of *reciprocity* between mind and matter. It is therefore not uncommon for a depressed African patient to describe his problem in purely physical terms, saying that ‘my body is broken’, which Bührmann (1987:276) attributes to the fact that ‘the general use of body terms for what Westerners would call emotions is very common’.

The holistic premise also implies that in the African conception of health and illness, it is the whole human body that is considered to be either well or ill, not merely some part of the body. Sogolo (1993) points out that a Western patient who visits a doctor will normally show the doctor which part of the body has a problem. The traditional African, however, does not normally refer to any specific part of the body when he or she describes an ailment and the healer will also not ask for more specific information.

Enrichment

Differences between the African and Western conceptions of stress

Godwin Sogolo (1993) maintains that in the Western context, stress can also be work- and object-related, while in the African context it is mainly community-related.

It is quite common for business executives in the West to suffer from stress when the business is under financial pressure. They work abnormally long hours without taking time off to rest in order to rescue the business, which could also result in stress, or their anxiety over measures that need to be put in place to rescue the business could also cause stress. The traditional African normally experiences stress that is related to relationships with their spiritual agents or members within their community. If he has broken any of the communal rules, for example if he stole something from his neighbour, he could suffer from stress even if the theft has gone unnoticed. The anxiety and feeling of guilt caused by this action could result in the person believing that a spell has been cast on him or he would become afflicted by some or other serious disease.

Enrichment

Incidence of suicide amongst Africans

In a historical survey, Julie Parle (2007:207) states that the paucity of research into suicide amongst Africans begs the question of whether self-killings were really as rare as a variety of sources – literary, anthropological, medical, psychiatric and anecdotal – seem to suggest. According to her, these sources gave rise to the conventional view that suicide amongst black Africans has always been rare, and that cultural and social taboos against self-destruction are particularly strong amongst Africans. Based on this assumption the conventional view ascribes the current rise in suicide amongst Africans to a weakening of the traditional constraints due to westernisation. Parle (2007:204), however, is of the conviction that there is sufficient archival evidence to suggest that self-annihilation was not entirely taboo amongst Africans. She believes that the so-called absence of suicide amongst Africans ‘may be attributed to poor record-keeping, as well as to the fact that until recently the act of deliberately attempting to take one’s life was regarded as primarily a legal, rather than a medical matter’. When Africans were charged with attempting suicide, a criminal conviction was recorded and it never became a medical/psychiatric statistic.

Linked to the meso-cosmic order, the African view of psychopathology cannot be separated from the role the ancestors, the malignant spirits and the sorcerers play in their lives. Pathological behaviour and illness are thus seen as the result of disharmony between a person and his or her ancestors, or caused by the evil spells or deeds of the malignant spirits or sorcerers. In a study Mokhosi and Grieve (2004) observed that many Africans believe that various ills, misfortune, sickness, injuries and accidents are the result of witchcraft, ancestral anger or *thwawa*.

Enrichment

Thwawa and sickness

Thwawa is a process of becoming a traditional healer. If a person is called to become a traditional healer and does not carry out the directive he/she received from an ancestor, punishment is believed to be meted out by the responsible ancestor. The punishment takes the form of emotional disturbance, epilepsy, injuries or ailments. It is believed that if the ‘patient’ goes through the rites of *thwawa*, carrying out the directives of the ancestor who was a *sangoma* or *nyanga*, he or she would fully recover (Mokhosi and Grieve, 2004:311).

According to Maiello (1999), the aetiology of pathology in African culture is not ascribed to the question of what caused the illness, but who brought it about. In a Western context the patient presents the doctor with the reason for his or her consultation, usually in the form of physical symptoms, but in the African context it is the healer who tells the patient why he or she has come to see the healer. Traditional healers also do not start their diagnosis of illness with a physical examination of the body; their primary concern is with the patient’s background in socio-cultural and in divine/supernatural relations. Rudnick (2002) notes that most forms of traditional healing involve some kind of triangulated mediation between the healer, patient and the ancestors, with the healer being able to consult the ancestors with regard to the patient’s problems.

What is the significance of ancestors in the lives of traditional Africans?

With reference to the ancestors, Bührmann (1984), a Jungian, postulates that they represent archetypes from the collective unconscious, and that pathology occurs when an imbalance exists between the conscious and unconscious. As archetypal projections, the ancestors communicate in altered states of consciousness, such as dreams, hypnogogic perceptions, trance conditions or hallucinations. Contrary to this view, Holdstock (2000:172) maintains that the ancestors are not experienced as abstract projections but as real persons who manifest themselves during waking in the form of visions and voices, or through the medium or diviner and in sleep through dreams. An encounter with the ancestors places a heavy demand on a person. Holdstock explains the importance of adhering to the customs and rituals surrounding burials. If these customs are not upheld, the ancestors become malevolent spirits that bring misery to the family, but if the family performs all the necessary rituals to show their respect, the ancestors become caring spirits who protect the family.

Beuster (1997:17) also notes that ancestors are seen as benevolent creatures who preserve the honour, traditions and good name of the tribe. The ancestors are vital for good mental health because they will protect the person against evil powers that can harm the person. If the demands of the ancestors, however, are ignored, they send disorder and misfortune – physical and mental illness – as punishment or warnings to amend one's behaviour.

What is the significance of malignant spirits and sorcerers in the lives of traditional Africans?

Malignant spirits and sorcerers are also seen as the cause of mental disorder amongst traditional African people. Supernatural creatures such as the *thikoloshe* and the *izithunzela* are believed to be able to inflict misfortune but also to cause mental disorder in their victims. The *thikoloshe* is believed to be a small man with one buttock and a gigantic penis, which is carried over the shoulder, while the *izithunzela* or zombie is a revitalised corpse without a tongue. According to Beuster (1997), accusations of malignant spirits and sorcery appear mostly in situations where the harmony of the group is threatened and a scapegoat is required to protect the well-being of the group. However, accusations of malignant spirits and sorcery are often projections of a person's own hatred and the manifestation of paranoid delusions.

KEY TERM

izithunzela: a revitalised corpse without a tongue

Western-oriented psychologists and psychiatrists, by ignoring the cultural context and belief systems of African people, have caused a lot of pain to African patients by way of misdiagnosis and applying 'anti-therapeutic' techniques. Cheetham and Griffiths (1981) established that a great percentage of African patients were misdiagnosed as 'schizophrenic' because of insufficient knowledge of the cultural background. If patients believed that they were being bewitched or that ancestors had spoken to them, ill-informed psychologists and psychiatrists diagnosed paranoid delusions and auditory hallucinations.

Self-evaluation question

- What are the differences between the traditional African and Western conceptualisations of pathological behaviour and emotional stress?

17.7 Psychotherapy

How does Western psychotherapy differ from African healing practices?

The therapeutic process in the African context differs from Western psychotherapy mainly with regard to the importance of verbal communication and the role of the individual patient in the therapeutic process.

In Western-style psychotherapy, popularly typified as a ‘talking cure’, *verbal communication* seems to be the most important feature of the process, whereas in traditional African healing practices, there seem to be a stronger focus on the expressive capacities of the whole body. In this regard Bührmann (1984:22) quotes an African healer who remarked that: ‘There are things you can never put in words; you can only feel them in your body’. A simple correspondence therefore does not exist between what in the West is called ‘psychotherapy’ and African healing practices focused on what we might call ‘psychological’ problems.

Within the Western context, psychotherapy is still predominantly focused on the individual, with group and family therapy playing a secondary role. Within the African context, therapy or healing is grounded in the collective existence of the micro-cosmic order, whereby the individual is always seen as an integral part of the community. Bührmann (1984:25) writes that:

Treatment, especially for any mental dysfunction, is not individual, but requires the cooperation of the family and at times the active treatment of others in the family.

Parle (2007:9) also finds that African therapeutic systems emphasise ‘collective social responses to afflictions’ rather than individualistic diagnosis and treatment. Because of this ethos of collectivism, it is not a strange occurrence for a patient to send a family member as substitute for a therapy session, which in a Western context would appear to be a form of resistance. The Western-trained therapist must be aware of the influence of these social structures on behaviour.

Enrichment

Link between Western psychotherapy and traditional healing

According to Rudnick (2002), it appears that there are basically two healing worlds in South Africa, the one Western and predominantly medically-oriented and the other African and predominantly spiritually-oriented. He draws a comparison between the dynamics of Western psychotherapy and traditional healing and comes to the

(continued)

conclusion that psychological factors which play a role in psychotherapy also play a vital role in shamanic healing, and he also tabulates the most important differences (see Table 17.1 below). Rudnick (2002:45) states:

Both Western therapists and African shamans are socially sanctioned healers of their respective cultures. Both use rituals to help relieve clients of their distress. In the case of Western therapy, the rituals could involve planned weekly sessions of therapeutic conversation, or amongst other things drama, art or hypnosis. In traditional healing it could involve rituals of throwing bones or an ecstatic trance.

He also notes that, in a similar way to psychotherapy, traditional healers and shamans make extensive use of rituals and objects steeped in symbolism which generally help to evoke in the client a sense of trust and belief. Most traditional healing incorporates some kind of confession and catharsis, which assists the client to offload the guilt and anxiety of a transgressed taboo or broken harmony with the ancestors.

Table 17.1 Rudnick's (2002:71) tabulation of differences between Western and African healing
Source: Rand Afrikaans University (University of Johannesburg)

	African healing	Western healing
1.	Practical relationship	Idealised (Rogerian) relationship
2.	Open (community) relationship	Confiding (private) relationship
3.	Directive approach	Mostly indirective approach
4.	Deals with supernatural and natural world	Deals mostly with natural world
5.	Focus is 'Who caused this?'	Focus is 'What is happening?'
6.	Aimed at social cohesion	Aimed at individual empowerment
7.	Healer tells client why he has come	Client tells therapist why he has come
8.	Mostly incorporates pharmacology	Sometimes resorts to pharmacology
9.	Generally prescribes a ritual	Rarely prescribes a ritual
10.	Boundaries often wide, e.g. client lives with healer	Boundaries mostly restricted, e.g. non-contact weekly visit
11.	Client motivation generally seen as conscious	Client motivation generally seen as unconscious
12.	Dreams are direct communications from ancestors	Dreams are intrapsychic and symbolic
13.	Healer's personal values intrinsic to the process	Therapist's personal values are subjugated
14.	Main tools are materials such as bones or equivalent	Main tools are verbal

It remains, however, an open question whether Western-trained psychotherapists can be made fully aware of cultural differences. As Maiello (1999:235) notes:

Yet, the knowledge a Western psychotherapist can acquire about another culture will inevitably remain superficial, and an infinity of culturally determined non-verbal clues cannot be learnt and shared. Researchers of intercultural therapy have in fact expressed doubts about the depth of its effectiveness ... This does not mean that cross-cultural therapy should not be undertaken ... I believe that knowing about the inevitable limits of cross-cultural therapeutic work will promote the necessary caution and respect in approaching patients from other cultures.

Self-evaluation question

- Discuss the differences between Western psychotherapy and traditional healing.

17.8 Evaluation of the perspective

It is undoubtedly so that the African perspective currently emerging in psychology provides a necessary corrective to the Western ethnocentrism and history of neglect of African reality in the discipline. Why should students in places like South Africa be satisfied with curricula where no African or black theoretical voices are heard, and where the content of theories either ignores Africa or objectifies it in an exotic, still Eurocentric manner (as is arguably the case with Jung)? According to Holdstock (2000:71) there is a lot to be gained by an Africentric psychology.

It sanctifies all living and non-living things in the context of mythology in order for us to understand the universe as a whole in our search for the fundamental meaning of life. Africentric psychology examines the very basic nature of our being and our interaction with everything around us. Its purpose is to try and understand where and how everything in the universe originated and its specific purpose within the universe.

But this also opens a point of possible critique. Does African psychology not essentialise cultural differences and romanticise a mythical construction of tradition at the expense of the messiness and contradictions of everyday life – especially in contemporary Africa? According to Stevens (2015:188), even though one appreciates the critique of mainstream psychology and its ethnocentrism, there exists in African psychology ‘the potential for unwittingly reifying and romanticizing the black or African experience’. Added to this is a tendency to be quite vague and even contradictory about the nature of Africa and Africanness.

In conclusion, then, African psychology is likely to keep on producing more theory, but also more disagreement and debate. Both are positive developments. The perspective and its key proponents have opened up a space in which we can challenge the cultural assumptions of mainstream psychology and keep on thinking about how we should define, develop and practise psychology in relation to existing African realities and all African people.

Self-evaluation question

- Critically evaluate the necessity of an African perspective in personology, and contemplate if a Westerner can contribute meaningfully to this perspective.

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